

From Denmark to America: The Christensen and Nielsen Families



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Preface

This work is truly a labor of love, and is dedicated to Jens Carl Nielsen and Christine Christensen, who immigrated to America to give us all a better life. I have always been interested in genealogical research, and started looking for our Danish ancestors some 15 years ago. I had all but given up, but Dolores Munch and I began to correspond via email in 2007, excited about all the online resources for research. It was especially important for me this past year as I finally realized my dream of traveling to Denmark to visit the villages in which Jens and Christine were born.

This will always be a “work in progress” and as new facts come to light, this document will be updated. This started out as a small project to collect a few genealogical records and photographs, but it grew into a larger project as we gained so much information about our family. This book should be accompanied by a CD with all the scanned photographs so you may print any photos you choose.

family

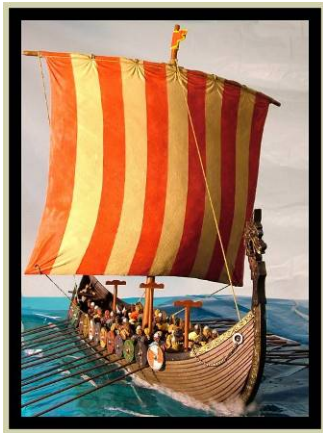
I hope you will enjoy learning about your family and also some interesting things about the history of Denmark, Jutland and Racine, Wisconsin. I thank all who contributed pictures and stories of our family; we collected more photographs and stories than we could have ever imagined.

-Ginger L. Pedersen, Boynton Beach, Florida, 2008

Update 2017 - My co-author Dolores Smith Munch passed away in 2013. This book is dedicated to her memory.

Front Cover – Christine & James Nelson, Nelson Family

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Viking Ship

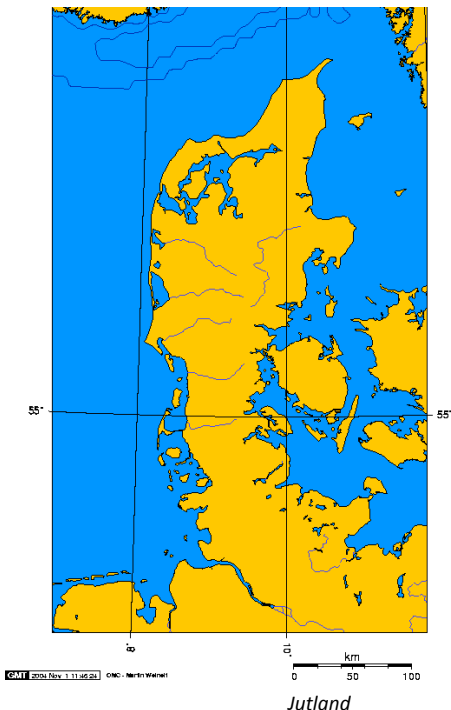
Introduction

Life in Denmark in the 1700 and 1800's, the oldest monarchy in the world, was much like other parts of central and northern Europe. Most people worked in farming, being employed as laborers on the farmlands that made up most of Denmark. Their lives were not long, as manual labor made up each day from a very young age. Our ancestors lived these lives and braved a long voyage across the Atlantic to bring their children a better life than they could have ever imagined in Denmark.

This document will chronicle the people of two families: the **Christensens** and the **Nielsens**, Christine Christensen and Jens Carl Nielsen (who later became James Carl Nelson). Their lives and families in Denmark tell a story that many immigrant families shared on their quest to America. The records found here are mostly due to the diligent work of Dolores Munch, granddaughter of Christine and Jens, who toiled many long hours searching through census records and church books to find our ancestors. This research was conducted mostly on the Internet, and the reference section of this book contains Internet web page links if you would like to try some research on your own.

Christine and Jens were my great grandparents, and their oldest daughter Lillian Katrina Nelson Pedersen was my grandmother. She spoke very fondly of her parents, and she would always very proudly say "my family is from Jutland."

And from Jutland they were. Jutland, or *Jylland*¹ in Danish, is the largest peninsula and region of Denmark. Unlike other parts of Denmark, Jutland is not an island and shares a southern border with Germany. By geologic timelines, Jutland has only been inhabited a short time, approximately since 8,000 B.C.² People traveled up the peninsula as the last ice age retreated and the glaciers that covered



¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jutland>

² <http://www.haervej.dk/english/tur-3.htm>



Jutland Heath Land

Jutland melted. The land was not very inviting; much of it was covered with bogs with very few trees for lumber. The natural ground covering of heath did not provide any building materials. Through centuries of hard work and farming, the people of Jutland were able to bring the land to where it is today, one of the most productive areas of Denmark.

We will trace the ancestors of Christine and Jens from the oldest records we found in church books (*Kirkeboger*) and census records³ (*Folketællinger*). Included are samples of how the church books and census records appear. The handwriting can be very difficult to read along with the fact these were written with quill pens and of course in Danish. As you read through these detailed family lineages, it will be helpful to refer to the family charts on pages at the back of the book as we went back many generations.

The Christensen Family

Ancestors of Hans Christensen, Father of Christine Christensen

Our family saga begins in Hvornum, a small village in the county of Randers in Jutland (see back of book for maps). The village is situated near a large lake and forests, and is surrounded by farmland.

The oldest record found was that of Hans Mogensen, born in 1754. He was married to Dorthe Olesdatter, born in 1779. The 1801 census recorded 224 people living in Hvornum, an average size Danish farming village. On the following page is the record from the 1801 census, translated into English (an original census page is included). Census records in Denmark are organized by the county, the district, the parish, and then the village. Often the village and parish name are the same.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Census_in_Denmark

Randers County, Onsild District, Hvornum Parish, Hvornum Village, Census Number 21

1801

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:
Hans Mogensen	47	Married	Husband	Head of Household and Wheelwright, owner of Land
Dorthe Olesdatter	31	Married	His wife	
Mogens Hansen	12	Not married	Their child	
Hans Hansen	11	Not married	Their child	
Christen Hansen	8	Not married	Their child	
Anne Marie Hansdatter	6	Not married	Their child	
Maren Jensdatter	67	Widow	The wife's Aunt	

Here we see Hans Mogensen, his family of four children and his wife's aunt. Although 67 is not "old" in today's time, at that time it was considered quite elderly, as the average lifespan was not much more than 45. It could also be that Hans and Dorthe had other older children who may have been working on farms in the area as children often left home in their early teens to work; most families simply did not have the means to support children until they married.



The Wheelwright's Tools

Also in this record we see illustrated one of the difficulties in tracing Danish records. We see that Hans Mogensen's children now have a different last name. That is because of the Scandinavian way of making last names (*Patronymics*⁴). To make a last name, you take the father's first name (Hans) and add *-sen* for a son (Hansen) and *-datter* for a daughter (Hansdatter). So from this we also know that Hans's father had the first name Mogen, but we don't know his last name. In 1828, a new law was passed requiring families to pick a name and stay with it, so we see that even daughters born after that year have *-sen* at the end of their name, like Karen Marie Hermansen rather than Hermansdatter. On an interesting note,

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patronymic>

Denmark has voted to return to the old method of naming. All babies born after April 2006 will no longer automatically have the father's last name. From *Time Magazine*, 7/22/05:

Starting next April, Danish newborns will no longer be required to share a last name with either of their parents, following the adoption of a new law that allows a return to the Viking tradition of patronymics. Instead of maintaining a single last name across generations, each generation of children, in this system, is given a last name that consists simply of the father's (or in these gender-egalitarian times, the mother's) first name with the suffix 'sen' or 'datter' (daughter) added on. Patronymic nomenclature prevailed throughout the country from Viking days and until 1828, when it was banned by law in favor of family surnames as institutions like public education and conscription required that the authorities keep records on large numbers of people. The 1828 law simply froze the process, dictating that new generations would keep the patronymic of the head of the family at that time. The unfortunate result was that two thirds of Danes still carry a limited selection of names such as Nielsen, Jensen and Hansen. (Both the former and current prime ministers are called Rasmussen, and foreigners often wonder whether they are related. They aren't; they're just Danes).



A typical Danish Farm

The Mogensen family was among the lucky ones in Jutland; they had land and the father had a profession, being a wheelwright, or someone who made wagon wheels, an important profession of the time. In all likelihood, the oldest son Hans would take over his father's profession and also inherit the land. Usually, only one child (the oldest son) would get the land and the house, and then have an obligation to care for the parents in old age. Although this might not seem fair, it makes sense in that if things were continuously split among the children, within a few generations the land parcels would be too small to support a family. Of course, we don't know how the house in which they lived actually appeared; in all likelihood it had a thatched roof and would have been made from half-timbers and fieldstones plastered over with stucco, or left natural.

Our next ancestor was Christen Hansen, who was eight at the time of the 1801 census. In this 1834 census record on the next page, we see that Christen Hansen has married Karen Marie Nielsdatter and they have children of their own. We see in this case that Christen

has taken over the house and land, and that Dorthe Olesdatter, now 65, lives with them. We don't know what happened to the older son Hans; he may have died or he may have found a living elsewhere and married into a family with land. We see that Christen Hansen has married Karen Marie Nielsdatter.

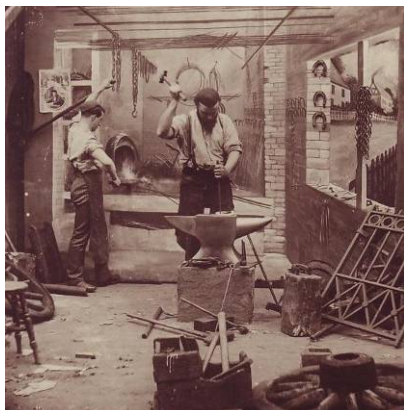
Randers County, Onsild District, Hvorum Parish, Hvorum Village, Census Number 7
1834

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:
Christen Hansen	41	Married	Husband	Wheelwright
Karen Marie Nielsdatter	38	Married	His wife	
Ane Christensdatter	11	Not married	Their child	
Niels Christensen	8	Not married	Their child	
Hans Christensen	4	Not married	Their child	
Christen Christensen	2	Not married	Their child	
Dorthe Olesdatter	65	Widow	Father's mother whom he provides for.	

Christen and Karen had four children, and we can see that Hans Mogensen has since died and his widow Dorthe is living with her son and his family. Notice that once again the family name has changed and now the children are named Christensen or Christensdatter.

Randers County, Onsild District, Hvorum Parish, Hvorum Village, Census Number 16
1840

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:
Christen Hansen	48	Married	Husband	Blacksmith and Wheelwright
Karen Marie Nielsdatter	45	Married	His wife	
Hans Christensen	10	Not married	Their child	
Christen Christensen	8	Not married	Their child	
Peder Christensen	5	Not married	Their child	
Dorthe Marie Christensen	1	Not married	Their child	



A typical blacksmith's shop

Seven years later in the 1840 census, we see that Dorthe Olesdatter must have passed away, and that the two oldest children listed in 1834, Niels and Ane, are no longer listed as living at home. We also see that two additional children, Peder and Dorthe, had been born since the last census. Many children were named for their grandparents, and little Dorthe was perhaps born soon after her grandmother died. Karen Marie was still having children at the age of 44.

Randers County, Onsild District, Hvorum Parish, Hvorum Village, Census Number 14
1840

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Christen Hansen	60	Married	Husband	Head of household and Blacksmith	Hvorum
Karen Marie Nielsdatter	56	Married	His wife		Bøstrup
Niels Christensen	24	Not married	Their child	Their son who is currently in military service	Hvorum
Dorthe Marie Christensen	11	Not married	Their child		Hvorum



A Danish Soldier

In the 1850 Census, Hans Christensen, our ancestor, has left home, and only Niels and Dorthe are listed as living at home. Perhaps Niels was on military leave and visiting his family when the census was taken. The census was conducted on February 1st, so that most would be at home during the winter months when not much farm work was being done. Also at this time the census began to collect information on place of birth, so we see that Karen Marie Nielsdatter was born in Bøstrup, on the island of Fyn. This is fairly far south from Hvorum, but she might have come to Jutland in search of work.

Now we move forward in time to 1880, and we see our ancestor Hans Christensen now married to Karen Marie Hermansen, with their children.

Randers County, Onsild District, Hvorum Parish, Hvorum Village, Census Number 13
1880

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Hans Christensen	49	Married	House Father	Shoe Worker	Hvorum
Karen Marie Hermansen	31	Married	His wife		Hvorum
Christine Christensen	8	Not married	Their child		Hvorum
Anine Christensen	4	Not married	Their child		Hvorum
Christen Christensen	2	Not married	Their child		Hvorum



Karen Marie Hermansen



Hans Christensen

The photographs to the left of Karen and Hans were taken from pictures hanging on the wall of some of our present day relatives in Denmark, and were the oldest family pictures we were able to locate. These were probably taken at their confirmation, around the age of 14.

Our best guess in looking at the census record is that he is listed as a shoemaker (*skoarbeider*) or shoe worker, meaning that he may have worked with a shoemaker. We see their oldest child, my great-grandmother Christine Christensen at age 8, and her younger sister Anine, and their brother Christen Christensen. We also found birth records of two more children of Hans and Karen, Christian Herman Christensen, born in 1880, and Pauline Christensen, born in 1883.

Ancestors of Karen Marie Hermansen, Mother of Christine Christensen

We could not trace the ancestors of Karen Marie Hermansen quite as far back as we could for Hans Christensen. Her family also was from the small village of Hvornum. Here we see her father's family in the 1801 census.

Randers County, Onsild District, Hvornum Parish, Hvornum Village, Census Number 21
1801

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:
Christen Hermandsen	30	Married	Husband	Soldier, head of household with land
Karen Jensdatter	25	Married	His wife	
Maren Christensdatter	5	-	Their child	
Maren Christensdatter	3	-	Their child	
Maren Christensdatter	70	Widow	The husband's aunt	Dependent



Downtown Randers

Karen Marie's father Herman Christensen was born just a few weeks after this census was taken. Finding this record used a combination of the Mormon Church references and the Danish online census archives. Notice how the spelling was a little different with the "D" in Hermandsen.

In this 1834 census record, we see Herman Christensen, his sister Ane Christensen and brother Jens Christensen working together.

Randers County, Onsild District, Hvornum Parish, Parish Estate, Census Number 1
1834

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:
Frederik Severin Brønsted	29	Married		Parish Pastor
Maria Dorothea Hein	25	Married	His wife	
Anna Cathinka Brønsted	2	Not married	Their child	
Maria Sophia Augusta Brønsted	1	Not married	Their child	
Anna Christine Dorothea Ballin	49	Widow	Father's mother	
Juliane Franciska Marschner	17	Not married		Servant/worker
Barbara Maria Pedersdatter	48	Not married		Servant/worker
Jacob Andersen	32	Married		Parish preacher
Johanne Jensdatter	31	Married	His wife	
Kirsten Jacobsen	1	Not married	Their daughter	
Herman Christensen	33	Not married		Servant/worker
Ane Christensdatter	21	Not married		Servant/worker
Jens Christensen	16	Not married		Servant/worker



Danish Farmhouse

This was a rather large household as the parish probably had substantial land holdings in the village. There may have been a large parish house where they all lived, or it may have been a collection of smaller dwellings within the parish's land.

In the next census twelve years later in 1845, we see that Herman has married and has several children.

Randers County, Onsild District , Hvorum Parish, Brøndum Village, Census Number 56

1845

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Herman Christensen	43	Married	Head of Household	Laborer	Hvorum
Ane Elisabeth Christensdatter	33	Married	His wife		Durup Parish, Aalborg County
Christen Hermansen	10	Not married	Their child		Hvorum
Jens Hermansen	8	Not married	Their child		Hvorum
Peder Hermansen	6	Not married	Their child		Hvorum
Niels Hermansen	3	Not married	Their child		Hvorum
Anders Hermansen	1	Not married	Their child		Hvorum



Poor Danish Families

Raising five boys must have been quite a chore for Ane, who in this census record is listed as being born in Aalborg county, which is about 40 miles north of Hvorum. We do not know where Ane Elisabeth Christensdatter and Herman Christensen met, but they were married January 10, 1835, Ane was 20 and Herman was 35. We see they were not living directly in Hvorum, but in a nearby village called Brøndum. We find the family next in the 1850 census, with Christine Christensen's mother Karen Marie Hermansen listed at the age of 4.

Randers County, Onsild District, Hvorum Parish, Hvorum Village, Census Number 28
1850

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Herman Christensen	49	Married	Head of household and Father	Day-Laborer	Hvorum
Ane Christensdatter	40	Married	His wife		Durup/Aalborg
Niels Hermansen	8	Not married	Their child		Hvorum
Anders Hermansen	6	Not married	Their child		Hvorum
Karen Marie Hermansen	4	Not married	Their child		Hvorum



Dairy Farming

Notice that the three older boys, Christen, Jens and Peder, are not listed on this census. The boys were probably working on other farms in the area and no longer living at home. The family also moved back to Hvorum village, and Herman's occupation is listed as day-laborer, meaning that he did not have a steady job, but he still had to support three small children and a wife.

The Nielsen Family

Ancestors of Peder Christen Nielsen, Father of Jens Carl Nielsen

While the Christensens were from Randers county, the Nielsen line originated in Viborg county (see back of book for maps). The town of Viborg is considered the capitol of Jutland, and is a very old town and has played an important role in the history of Jutland. The Vikings in all likelihood founded the town in the 8th century, and Viborg is one of the oldest towns in Denmark.⁵

The most distant ancestor we found for Peder Christen Nielsen was Maren Jensdatter, born in 1774. She was married to Peder Keisen. In 1816, they had a daughter named Ane Pedersdatter. Peder died



Viborg Coat of Arms

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viborg,_Denmark

in 1823 at the age of 54. In 1824, Maren married widower Mikkel Christensen and we see them in the 1834 census record.

Viborg County , Sønderlyng District, Ørum Parish, Veltz Village, Census Number 11
1834

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Mikkel Christensen	53	Married	Head of Household	Lives off the land	
Maren Jensdatter	60	Married	His wife		

Below we see Maren living with her husband Mikkel and daughter Ane in the 1840 census.

Viborg County, Sønderlyng District, Ørum Parish, Veltz Village, Census number 66
1840

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Mikkel Christensen	60	Married	Head of Household	Lives off the land	
Maren Jensdatter	67	Married	His wife		
Ane Pedersdatter	25	Unmarried	Their daughter		



Seal of Viborg

As we move forward to the 1845 census, we see that Maren Jensdatter has died and than Ane Pederdatter has married Niels Christensen and they have two children, Marie Chirstine and Peder Christen, our ancestor. Ane Pedersdatter, her husband, Niels Christensen and their children are living with Ane's step-father, Mikkel Christensen.

Viborg County, Sonderlyng District, Orum Parish, Veltz Village, Census number 13
1845

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Mikkel Christensen	68	Widower		Head of Household, Day-Laborer	In the parish
Niels Christensen	29	Married		Renter, Day-Laborer	Lundø
Ane Pedersdatter	29	Married	His wife		In the parish
Marie Chirstine Nielsdatter	4	Unmarried	Their child		In the parish
Peder Christen Nielsen	1	Unmarried	Their child		In the parish

In the 1850 census, we see that Mikkel Christensen has passed away. More children have been born into the family of Niels Christensen and Ane Pedersdatter. Our ancestor, Peder Christen, is now 6 years old.

Viborg County, Sonderlyng District, Orum Parish, Veltz Village
1850

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Niels Christensen	34	Married	Head of Household	Renter, Day-Laborer	Lundø, Viborg County
Ane Pedersdatter	34	Married	His wife		In the parish
Marie Chirstine Nielsdatter	7	Unmarried	Their child		In the parish
Peder Christen Nielsen	6	Unmarried	Their child		In the parish
Ana Marie Nielsen	3	Unmarried	Their child		In the parish
Christen Nielsen	1	Unmarried	Their child		In the parish

Later, we find Niels and Ane in the 1880 census. What is interesting about this record is that we see this elderly couple have taken in two orphaned children, even though they were not very well off. We see Niel Christensen's occupation listed here as "rag-picker" (*Kludesamler* in Danish). This is someone who went door-to-door with a wagon and bought scrap materials like old rags, bones, metal – anything that could be sold for scrap. This was a needed ancient form of recycling in days when there was no public sanitation.

Viborg County, Sønderlyng District, Ørum Parish, Veltz Village, Census Number 11
1880

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Niels Christensen	65	Married	Head of Household	Rag-Picker	Lundø, Viborg County
Ane Pedersdatter	64	Married	His wife		In the parish
Chresten Nielsen	29	Unmarried	Their son		In the parish
Hansine Karoline Marie Thisted	4	Unmarried	Foster child		
Ane Berthe Dorthea Kerstine Hansen	1	Unmarried	Foster child		Tjele Parish



Old Viborg



Viborg from the East

Ancestors of Birthe Christine Jensdatter, mother of Jens Carl Nielsen

This line of the family yielded the oldest records we found. Søren Sørensen, born in 1696 was married to Ane Jensen, born in 1703. They lived in the village of Lindum. Søren and Ane had a son whom they also named Søren, so we have another Søren Sørensen, this one born in 1835. He married Kirsten Jacobsen, born in 1833. They had a son, and again named him Søren, born in 1755, so three generations in a row carried that name. He married Dorthe Christensen, born in 1756. They had a daughter, Birthe Sørensdatter, born in 1789, who married Christen Nielsen, born in 1772. Christen Nielsen's parents were Kirstine Laudunsen and Niels Jorgensen. Birthe and Christen's daughter Karen Christensdatter was born in 1818 in Lindum. All the records mentioned above were obtained from the Mormon records on the Internet at www.Familysearch.org, so in this case we also have death dates which are recorded on the Nielsen chart at the back of the book.

The oldest actual census record we found in the Danish Internet database is the record on the next page from the 1787 census. The family lived in Fiskbaek village, which is north of Viborg along the coastline. "Fisk" in Danish means Fish, no doubt a common meal of the family. Here we see our ancestor, Else Mortensdatter, at the age of eight.

Viborg County, Norlyng District, Fiskbæk Parish, Fiskbæk Village
1787

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Morten Povelsen	36	Married	Husband	Farmer	
Johanne Andersdatter	38	Married	His wife		
Anders Mortensen	13	Not Married	Their child		
Else Mortensdatter	8	Not Married	Their child		
Povel [Mortensen]	5	Not Married	Their child		
Lars [Mortensen]	2	Not Married	Their child		

Moving forward to the 1801 census, here we see the family once again with more children. Look at Jens Mortensen, age 5. His mother is listed at age 54, so that means she was 49 when he was born.

Viborg County, Norlyng District, Fiskbæk Parish, Fiskbæk Village, Census Number 3
1801

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Morten Povelsen	53	Married	Husband	Farmer	
Johanne Andersdatter	54	Married	His wife		
Anders Mortensen	27	Not Married	Their child	Blacksmith	
Else Mortensdatter	16	Not Married	Their child		
Kirsten Mortensdatter	10	Not Married	Their child		
Jens Mortensen	5	Not Married	Their child		
Birthe Mortensdatter	55	Not Married	Husband's sister	Renter	

We go quite a bit forward in time now to 1834, to see that Else has married Laurs Jensen, and two of their children are listed here, including our next direct ancestor, Jens Laursen.

Viborg County, Norlyng District, Fiskbæk Parish, Fiskbæk Village, Census Number 12
1834

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Laurs Jensen	57	Married		Farmer	
Else Mortensdatter	55	Married		His wife	
Daniel Laursen	21	Not Married		Their child	
Jens Laursen	16	Not Married		Their child	

In the 1840 census, we see that Jens is no longer living at home, but brother Daniel is still living at home.

Viborg County, Norlyng District, Fiskbæk Parish, Fiskbæk Village, Census Number 9
1840

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Laurs Jensen	63	Married		Farmer	
Else Mortensdatter	60	Married		His wife	
Daniel Laursen	27	Not Married		Their son	

Moving forward to 1845, now Daniel is listed as the head of household, and the parents are listed as retired. It could be that they owned some land and that Daniel was farming that land and caring for his parents as the oldest son.

Viborg County, Norlyng District, Fiskbæk Parish, Fiskbæk Village, Census Number 3
1845

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Daniel Laursen	32	Not Married		Farmer	Fiskbaek
Laurs Jensen	67	Married		Retired	Fiskbaek
Else Mortensdatter	65	Married		His wife	Fiskbaek

In 1855 our ancestor, Jens Laursen (Jens Carl Nielsen's grandfather) is living in Nørre Vinge, which is about 15 miles from Fiskbaek and lies to the east of Viborg. Also on the census are his wife Karen Christensen and their two children, Else Kirstine Jensen and Birthe Christine, who would be the mother of Jens Carl Nielsen.

Viborg County, Sønderlyng District, Nørre Vinge Parish, Vinge Village, Census Number 22
1855

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Jens Laursen	38	Married	Head of Household	Living off his land	Fiskbæk parish
Karen Christensen	37	Married	His wife		Lindum parish
B. Christine Jensen	11	Not married	Their child		Lindum parish
E. Kirstine Jensen	9	Not married	Their child		Here in the parish

We have traced both the Nielsen and Jensdatter lines to bring us to the marriage of Birthe Christine Jensdatter and Peder Christen Nielsen. They were married November 27, 1872 in Nørre Vinge. Jens Carl Nielsen was born June 6, 1873. Tragically his father Peder died December 9, 1873. He was only 29. That left Birthe as a young widow with a child. She was living with her parents, and in the 1880 census we see Jens Carl Nielsen living with his grandparents.

Viborg County, Sønderlyng District, Nørre Vinge Parish, Nørre Vinge Village
1880

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Jens Laursen	62	Married	Husband	Living off his land	Fiskbæk
Karen Christensen	62	Married	His wife		Lindum
Else Kirstine Jensen	33	Not married	Their daughter		Here in the parish
Jens Carl Nielsen	6	Not married	Grandson		Here in the parish



Viborg from the East in winter

So where is his mother Birthe in this the 1880 census record? We see his grandparents, his aunt and Jens. Maybe Birthe was working in another household to help support herself. We do know that she remarried in 1878 to a widower in Nørre Vinge. In all likelihood, Jens Carl Nielsen grew up with his grandparents. In the 1890 census, we see Jens Laursen living with his now-married daughter Else and her family. Jens Carl was not living with them, and his grandmother Karen has passed away. Jens Carl Nielsen was probably working at another farm somewhere in Viborg county, although we did not find him in any other 1890 census record.

**Viborg County, Sønderlyng District, Nørre Vinge Parish, Vinge Village,
1890**

Name:	Age:	Marital status:	Occupation in household:	Occupation:	Birth place:
Peder Kristian Mogensen	45	Married	Head of Household	House owner	Vindum
Else Kirstine Jensen	43	Married	Wife		Vinge
Karl Magnus Johannes Johansen	5	Not married	Child		Vindum
Jens Laursen	71	Widowed	Being cared for	Road work	Fiskbæk

So ends the review of the detailed family records. They can be confusing at times, and it helps to refer to the family charts at the back of the book to see the many generations we found.

Jens Carl Nielsen's First Trip to America

It had always been said in the family that Jens had traveled to America and then returned to Denmark to get married. I had tried to research this for many years through the Danish Emigration archives. Beginning in 1868⁶, all emigrants from Denmark were required to register with local authorities and show their travel

⁶ <http://www.emiarch.dk/info.php3?l=en>

tickets. This started because many travel agents would take money from unsuspecting people and issue worthless tickets. So the Danish government issued contracts where dealers had to register to sell ship passage tickets. I never found a record for “James Carl Nelson”, which ended up being Jens’s legal name in America. When Dolores discovered his Danish name, we were able to confirm that he had indeed first traveled to America in 1893, at the age of 19.

The emigration record is as follows:



The Steamship Norge

First Name:	Jens
Last Name:	Nielsen
Ethnicity:	Denmark, Danish
Last Place of Residence:	[blank]
Date of Arrival:	May 22, 1893
Age at Arrival:	20 years
Gender:	M
Marital Status:	[blank]
Ship of Travel:	Norge
Port of Departure:	Copenhagen
Manifest Line Number:	0032

We do not know where Jens went in America, or how long he stayed. The second emigration record for Jens gives a little more detail:

Name:	Nielsen, Jens Carl	Occupation:	Worker (no land)
Age:	20	Destination:	Aspinwall, Ia.
Contract no.:	36600	Registration date:	2/28/1894
Birth place:	?	Birth place:	?
Last res. parish:	Nr. Vinge	Last res. county:	Viborg
Last residence:	Vinge, Viborg	Destination country:	USA
Destination city:	Aspinwall	Destination state:	Iowa
Name of ship:	Indirekte		
IDcode:	I9294N5510		

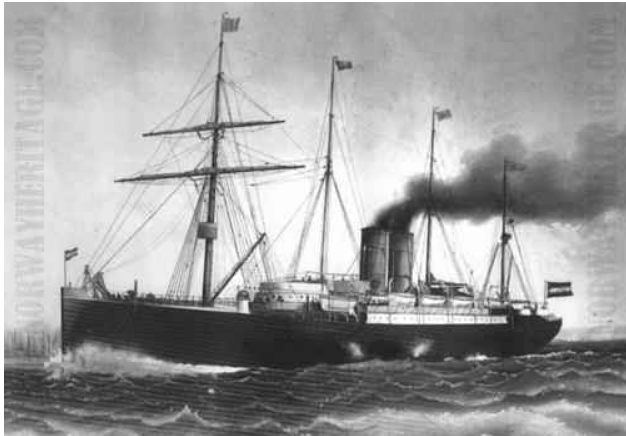
We see that Jens left Nørre Vinge in 1894, and that his ship was listed as “indirekte” which means an indirect route to America. In the 1890’s it was less expensive to take the indirect route. Jens probably took a train from Viborg south to Hamburg, a major port city in Germany. He would have sailed from Germany to the east coast of England and then taken a train to Liverpool, a large port city with many ships destined for New York or other east coast ports such as Boston or Philadelphia.



Manilla, Iowa

We can’t say for sure at what port he landed, but we do know his final destination was listed as Aspinwall, Iowa. Aspinwall is located in southwestern Iowa, and is near a major train depot that was located in Manilla, Iowa. This general area attracted many Danish immigrants, so Jens may have had a friend who was already living in the area. Donald Nelson, son of Clara Nelson, recalls that Jens had a note pinned to his jacket that said “Manilla, Iowa” so that if he got lost, someone would be able to help as he probably spoke little English. Near Manilla, Danes even founded their own town of Astor, which was physically moved to Manilla when the railroad (*The Milwaukee Line*) decided to locate their end station in Manilla. The area is very rural and certainly looked very much like the area in Denmark from which he emigrated.

We do not know if Jens already knew Christine Christensen when he first went to America in 1893, and that is why he returned once again to marry her and travel back to America. We assume they married in Denmark in 1895, but we do not have an exact wedding date. We did find Christine’s emigration record from 1895 on the next page.



The Steamship Saale

First Name:	Christine
Last Name:	Nielsen
Ethnicity:	Denmark
Last Place of Residence:	[blank]
Date of Arrival:	May 10, 1895
Age at Arrival:	24 years
Gender:	F
Marital Status:	[blank]
Ship of Travel:	Saale
Port of Departure:	Bremen & Southampton

What was the Atlantic crossing like? If you have ever been on a modern cruise ship, it was nothing like that. Although the introduction of the steamship cut the crossing time by several weeks (it took 53 days on the average with sails), it still took from twelve to fifteen days to make the crossing.⁷ Most of the immigrants traveled in what is called “steerage”, which was a deck between the main deck and the storage deck. Passengers were provided with bunk beds and meals, but were usually not permitted on the main deck with the first and second-class passengers who had their own cabins. Traveling third-class was not very comfortable.



A scene from steerage

James and Christine Nelson in America

After Jens and Christine arrived in America, Jens Carl Nielsen became James Carl Nelson. Many times the immigration agent automatically “anglicized” names when issuing papers, or sometimes the immigrant would request that their name be changed to fit in better with American life. They probably made



College Ave and 6th Street in Racine

⁷ For a more detailed description of ship travel, please see the website at <http://www.norwayheritage.com>.

their way to Racine via train from the east coast port where they arrived.

Why did they choose Racine, Wisconsin to settle down? In all likelihood, they had friends or relatives who had already immigrated to Racine and wrote back that work was plentiful, or perhaps they had a place they could stay while they settled in America. One thing is for certain, there were plenty of Danes to befriend in Racine. According to a study just published in Denmark, Racine was a focal point for Danish immigration, often serving as a place to start for Danish immigrants who eventually moved farther west in search of land.⁸ In this study, Danish immigration is described as “chain-immigration” where friends and relatives would follow once a few had moved to Racine. We do know that some of Christine’s relatives came over later; her nephew Hans Albrektsen and niece Margaret Albrektsen, children of her sister Anine, immigrated to Racine and eventually moved to Florida. Many also came to Racine because of religious persecution in Denmark as many Danish Baptists came to Racine and founded the first Danish Baptist church in America.

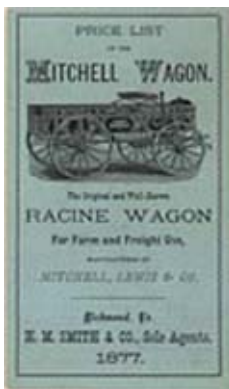
There was also a need for skilled craftsmen to work in the many manufacturing jobs in Racine. Racine was founded as a port city on Lake Michigan where tons of wheat were shipped throughout the Great Lakes region from the numerous wheat fields in the interior counties. As an outgrowth of that industry, many industrialists such as Jerome I. Case founded manufacturing plants for farm machinery in Racine County. Case invented a wheat threshing machine that became the industry standard. In the 1870’s, the land was exhausted and the wheat industry in Wisconsin collapsed, but the Racine manufacturing base thrived.



4TH OF JULY PARADE ON MAIN STREET IN LATE 1800'S
Fourth of July on Main Street, 1800's



Advertisement from the J.I. Case Company



Brochure from the Mitchell Wagon Company

⁸ De drog til Racine - Den danske indvandring til Racine County, Wisconsin, USA - et detailstudie af pull-effekten som den udfoldede sig i 1800-tallet Publisher: Books on Demand GmbH, København, Danmark, 2007 ISBN 978-87-7691-218-5

Another employer was the Mitchell Wagon Works. Henry Mitchell's company made about one-third of all the wagons in the United States, and advertised in Danish newspapers for Danish craftsmen and mechanics to work in his factory.



1905 Harley-Davidson Motorcycle

What kind of work did James do? We know that he owned a bicycle shop that was on Northwestern Avenue and later on State Street which also sold Harley-Davidson motorcycles. We think the store was opened in 1916 and was sold or closed in 1925. He also did quite a bit of construction work, and his death certificate listed his occupation as "construction." As the children started to arrive in 1897, he had to support his family so he probably worked at a variety of jobs. We did find the 1900 Census Record that listed James as working as a day-laborer and renting the house in which they were living. As the table below indicates, the children of James and Christine began arriving in 1897, with the birth of Christ Nelson.

James Carl Nelson Family – Racine, Wisconsin

Name	Relationship	Birth Date	Birth Place	Death Date	Age
James Carl Nelson	Husband	6/6/1873	Nørre Vinge, Denmark	11/26/1949	76
Christine Christensen	Wife	8/25/1871	Hvornum, Denmark	5/20/1936	64
Christ Nelson	Son	4/3/1897	Racine, Wisconsin	3/19/1975	78
Lillian Katrina Nelson Pedersen	Daughter	8/25/1899	Racine, Wisconsin	10/1984	85
Alma Nelson Thomson	Daughter	3/8/1901	Racine, Wisconsin	9/7/1994	93
Agnes Nelson Peck	Daughter	1/30/1904	Racine, Wisconsin	11/26/1978	74
Clara Nelson Bridgett	Daughter	9/21/1907	Racine, Wisconsin	2/12/1959	52
Mary Nelson Smith	Daughter	4/2/1910	Racine, Wisconsin	2/17/1997	87

Looking through old Racine directories, Dolores found many detailed records of where James was working and where they lived in Racine.

1910 - James Nelson is listed as a Contractor Laborer
1912 and 1914 - James Nelson is listed as a Mason and lived at 916 Forest Street
1916 - James Nelson has a business at 1917 Northwestern Avenue – James C. Nelson Bicycles
1918 - James Nelson has a business at 1917 Northwestern Avenue – Racine Cycle Co., James C. Nelson
1920 - James Nelson is living at 1814 Spring Street
1920 and 1921 - James Nelson has a business at 1911 Northwestern Avenue – James C. Nelson & Son Motorcycles
1923 - James Nelson is living at 1814 Spring Street
1923 - James Nelson has a business at 1931 State Street – James C Nelson & Son Motorcycles
1925 and 1926 - There are no listings. He must have sold the house and the business.
1929 - James C (Christina) Nelson, 1017 Grove Avenue, occupation listed as a mason.
1931 - James C Nelson, 1017 Grove Avenue, occupation listed as a mechanic at Herrick Ave. Auto Parts Co.
1933 - James C Nelson lives at 224 Howland Avenue
1934 and 1935 - James C Nelson lives at 1714 Prospect Avenue
1936 - James C Nelson lives at 2016 Carmel Avenue. They are living here when Christine dies.
1937 - James Nelson rented the upstairs flat at 304 Blaine Avenue after Christine died.
1945 - James C Nelson is living at 1614 Ninth Street and his occupation is listed as Carpenter.
He also lived at 705 Blaine Avenue and a house on LaSalle Street.

There is no doubt that all of the Nelson children kept Christine very busy. We also know that Christine had another child that was stillborn, probably born between Agnes and Clara. My grandmother told me the story that the baby was born at home, but was deformed and tiny, with strange long fingers. Apparently they buried the baby in a wooden box, its body surrounded by cotton. It must have been one of those moments from childhood that one never forgets.

Another story that my grandmother told me was about Christine's mother's (Karen Marie Hermansen) death in Denmark. Of course at that time such news traveled by letter, so a person found out weeks later that a loved-one had passed away. My grandmother said Christine kept a picture of her mother on the night stand and when the letter came informing her of the news, she clutched that picture and cried terribly.

Lillian was the first to marry, but Alma was the first to have children with the birth of Edward Thomsen in 1922. The grandchildren came right and left during the 1920's and 1930's, and Christine must have spent much time helping to take care of all the grandchildren.

Shirley Pedersen Schneider, daughter of Lillian Nelson Pedersen, shares the following story about her grandparents, and life in Wisconsin during the 1930's:



The Great Depression



Fels-Naptha Laundry Soap



Washboard and Tub

"It was a great and wonderful life being a child living in Wisconsin in the 1930's. We had no war to worry about, no terrorists, no atom bomb, no pollution and never a thought to any country invading us. Of course we had the Depression and we were poor, but it seemed like everyone was living in the same conditions as we were so it seemed normal.

We enjoyed nature more because we didn't have television to occupy our minds. We walked in the fields to pick wild flowers, laid in those same fields to watch clouds form different shapes we could identify, and at night we laid on a blanket looking up to find the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper plus waiting to see a falling star. The woods always were a mystery when we walked through them. We walked along the railroad tracks to pick wild asparagus and strawberries. We ran through cornfields hiding from one another. Yes, life was very sweet and simple in those days.

But the main thing in our lives was "the family" and the closeness we all shared. Sundays we usually all gathered at Grandma and Grandma Nelson's house. Grandma always had a big pot of soup on the stove or a one-dish meal. My mother usually baked a cake to bring along. I loved to watch Grandma make the soup, especially my favorite, *Grønkaalssuppe* (green kale soup)⁹. She put a large pot of water on the stove with a ham hock in it then she soaked all the green kale in the sink with lots of salt, which made the bugs float off the kale. She checked each piece of kale before she would grind it to add to the soup. Then she cut small pieces of carrots, parsnips and potatoes to add to the pot. Last, she would add the barley.

We all sat down at a round table and sometimes on the floor and we all ate the soup and bread. When the sweet corn was in season, she would feed us nothing but sweet corn for the meal.

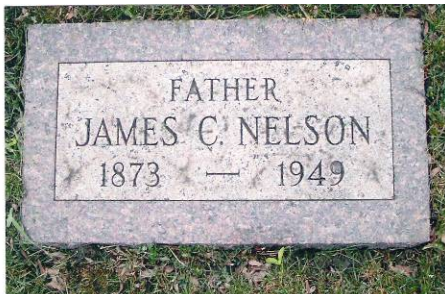
While our parents visited with their folks, us kids would be busy drawing squares with chalk on the sidewalk so we could play hopscotch. We always managed to find something to do. We played tag and hide and seek. Once in awhile Grandma Nelson would put an old blanket on the clothesline and lower it so we had a tent. She would bring us little bags of goodies to eat. I only remember the raisins in them.

Poor Grandma! Every Monday you would see her boiling pots of water on a fire out in the back yard. She scrubbed all the clothes on a washboard using Fels-Naptha soap. By the end of the day she would be exhausted. She was a small woman and generally wore long dresses, black stockings and a dust hat.

⁹ See recipe section for a recipe for *Grønkaalssuppe*.

Grandpa Nelson was a big handsome man who doted on my grandmother all the time. He dealt with any problem with a humane dexterity. When one of his daughters had a child out-of-wedlock, he never shamed her nor made her give up the child for adoption. Instead they adopted the child to give both his daughter and grandchild a chance at a normal life. Everyone was for family – good or bad. They stuck together and helped one another. I don't remember having any fat kids in our school, I guess because we walked a lot did not have so much junk food. We didn't have problems with drugs and crime was almost at a standstill. The big crime in our area was when Dillinger robbed our local bank in Racine.¹⁰ We probably all grew up with our families intact, which gave us all a better look at life. Yes, our childhood days were beautiful, thanks to security we felt from the wonderful love of our families.

The last time I saw Grandma Nelson she was in the last stages of senility. She was sitting next to Grandpa trying to look at a magazine. She reached over and took his glasses off and placed them over her glasses because she said she didn't know where her glasses were. As child, I thought that was so funny to see. Grandpa hugged and kissed her and she looked up at him and smiled. A line came to mind – "In sickness and in health, till death do us part." That loving couple passed their teachings on to their children who in turn passed them on to us. Thank heavens for giving us all the true meaning of "family." I hope to pass it on!!



Caring for so many grandchildren must have eventually taken a toll on Christine's health, and she suffered a stroke in 1936. She seemed to be recovering some from that stroke, but she suffered another one and died on May 20, 1936 at the age of 64.

Many have commented that James was never the same after the death of Christine. He continued on in Racine, and lived at various times with children or by himself. He died in 1949, from old age in Racine.

James and Christine certainly would be so proud today to see the accomplishments of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and other generations to come. They came from such humble beginnings in the Danish countryside, and came to America to have a better life for themselves and their children. They certainly achieved that, and allowed all of us who have followed to also live the American Dream.

¹⁰ For details on the Racine bank robbery, see <http://www.theweylands.com/racinebankrobbery.html>



Denmark, My Native Land

*In Denmark I was born, 'tis there my home is,
From there my roots, and there my world extend.
You Danish tongue, as soft as Mother's voice is,
With you my heartbeats O so sweetly blend.
You windswept Danish strand,
Where ancient chieftain's barrow
Strands close to apple orchard, hop and mallow,
'Tis you I love - Denmark, my native land!*

*O where does summer strew her bed all over
With lovelier flowers than here, by open strand?
Where shines the silver moon on field of clover
So bright as in the beech's native land?
You windswept Danish strand,
Where Dannebrog is waving,
You came - O flag - from God, our foes outbraving!
'Tis you I love - Denmark, my native land!*

*On day all Nordic lands were in your power
And England too - no longer your domains.
A tiny land, but in the world you tower -
There ring the song and chisel of the Danes.
You windswept Danish strand,
The ploughshare finds past treasure;
God bless your future too in golden measure!
'Tis you I love - Denmark, my native land!*

*You land where I was born, and where my home is,
From where my roots derive, my world extends,
Where language is as soft as Mother's voice is,
And with my heartbeats like sweet music blends.
You windswept Danish strand,
For swans to build their nest in,
Green island home on earth, for heart to rest in,
'Tis you I love - Denmark, my native land!*

-Hans Christian Andersen, 1850

Christensen and Nelson Family Pictures



Karen Marie Hermansen



Hans Christensen



Karen Marie Hermansen and Hans Christensen



Karen Marie Hermansen,
Christine Christensen and Hans Christensen



Karen Marie Hermansen, in her late 70's, probably taken around 1920. The man is probably her son Christen. Taken in Hvornum, Denmark.



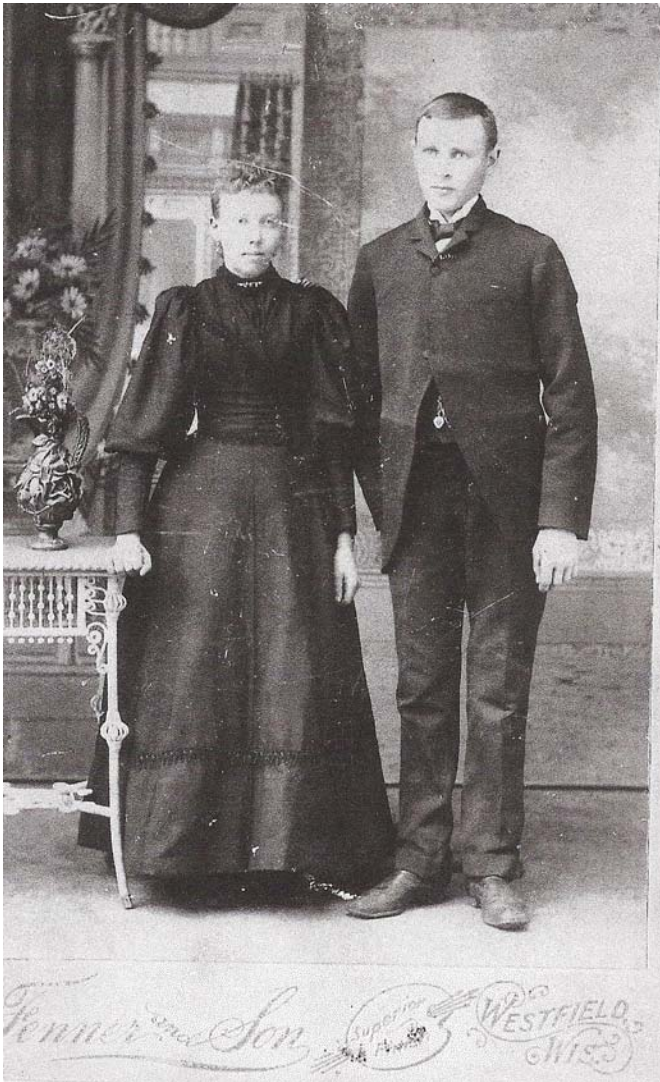
Anine Christensen, in her uniform for working in the dairy of the Gissfeld Abbey.



Jens Carl Nielsen (James Carl Nelson), probably around the age of 16.



Christine Christensen, around the age of 14, possibly a confirmation picture.



Earliest known photograph of James and Christine together, probably taken around 1896. The picture was taken in Westfield, Wisconsin, which is near Madison.



Alma, Agnes, Christine (holding Mary), James and Clara, probably taken in 1911 or 1912.



Christ, James, Alma, Christine holding Agnes, and Lillian, probably taken about 1906.



James on a Marsh-Metz motorcycle, probably one from his bicycle shop, taken around 1906.

Many people in this picture are not identified, but we see James and Christine on the left and their daughter Alma with the bows in her hair.



Agnes Nelson on her confirmation day.



Alma Nelson on her confirmation day.



Clara Nelson on her confirmation day.



Mary, Agnes and Clara Nelson



Alma and Mary Nelson



Mary and Lillian Nelson



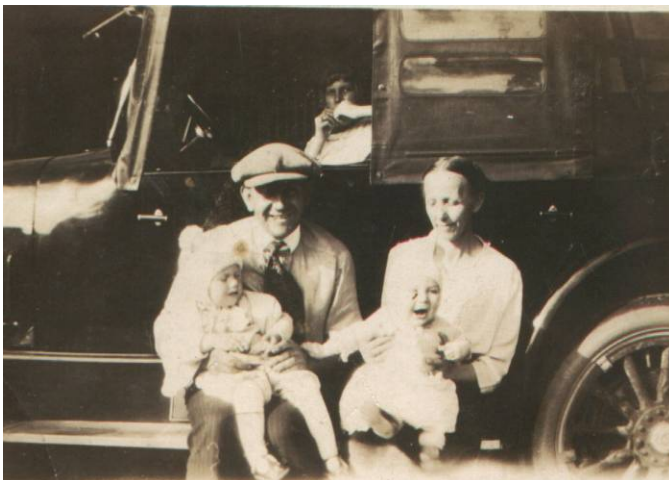
Margaret Albrektsen (cousin), Mary Nelson, Alma Thomsen, Victor Thomsen, James and Christine Nelson



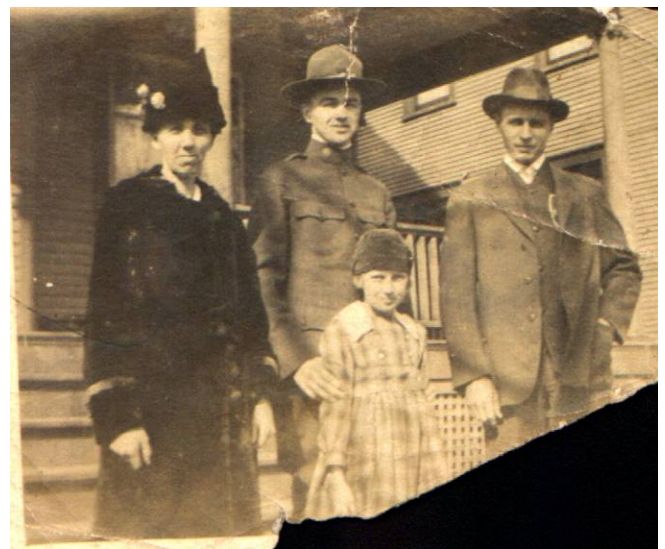
Christ Nelson, who served in World War I



Christine Nelson and Jack Pedersen



Vic Thomsen, Edward and Victor Thomsen Jr. , Christine Nelson



Christine Nelson, John Pedersen, Mary Nelson, James Nelson



Top: James Nelson (holding Victor Thomsen, Jr.), Alma Thomsen, Victor Thomsen, Mary Nelson, Christ Nelson, Edna Nelson, John Pedersen, Lillian Pedersen, (holding Jack Pedersen)
Bottom: Margaret Albrektsen (cousin), Agnes Nelson, Edward Thomsen.



James Nelson



Victor Thomsen, Jr., Christine Nelson,
Jack Pedersen and Edward Thomsen



Christ Nelson and James Nelson



Christine and James Nelson on their 25th Wedding Anniversary



James Nelson and Donald Nelson



Mary Nelson, Christine Nelson, Shirley Pedersen, Lillian Pedersen



Christine and James Nelson



James Nelson and Dog



James Nelson and Dog



James Nelson and Chico in Florida



James Nelson and Dog



James Nelson in his bicycle shop, 1922

THIS AD APPEARED IN THE 1921 EDITION OF
THE RACINE HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK.



Great Days With a Harley-Davidson!

They ARE great days when you have Her in the sidecar and you travel comfortably, safely and speedily along shady roads, beside noisy brooks and into the cool, inviting woods.

Think of the many trips like this that you can take when you own a Harley-Davidson—the dependable and economical mount.

Every season you postpone getting a Harley-Davidson Motorcycle you have lost a series of good times. Why wait longer?

Come in and talk it over with us. No obligation.

James C. Nelson

1911 Northwestern Avenue

RACINE, WISCONSIN

Christ Nelson

married

Edna Amelia Walker

February 18, 1925

Children: Jeanne Dolores Nelson (1926-1995), Robert Nelson (1929), Elaine Nelson (1933)



Christ Nelson



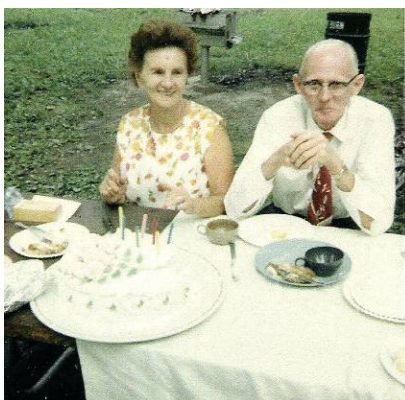
Elaine, Christ and Edna Nelson



Jeanne Studey, John Studey,
Eugene Studey



Jeanne Studey and Elaine Nelson, 1994



Edna and Christ Nelson, 1968

We do not have much detail on Christ Nelson's life. According to his grandson, John Studey, Christ served as an ambulance driver in France during World War I. He worked for over 20 years for the Jacobsen Manufacturing Company in Racine, which manufactured lawn mowers. He worked in the quality control department. He retired in 1962 at the age of 65 and lived with his wife Edna in a house built for them by their son-in-law, John Studey. He raised day-lilies as a hobby in retirement.

His grandson writes:

"My fondest memories of him were sitting on the porch together in the summertime enjoying a cream soda. I remember him as a soft-spoken, kind and gentle man who I miss even to this day."

I think Christ was a true Dane – A family man, quiet and hard-working.

Lillian Katrina Nelson

married

John Peter Pedersen

June 14, 1919

Children: Jack James Pedersen (1923-1998), Shirley Mae Pedersen Schneider (1926)



John Peter Pedersen and Lillian Katrina Nelson on their wedding day.



Jack James Pedersen



Jack James Pedersen and Shirley Mae Pedersen



Jack James Pedersen and Shirley Mae Pedersen



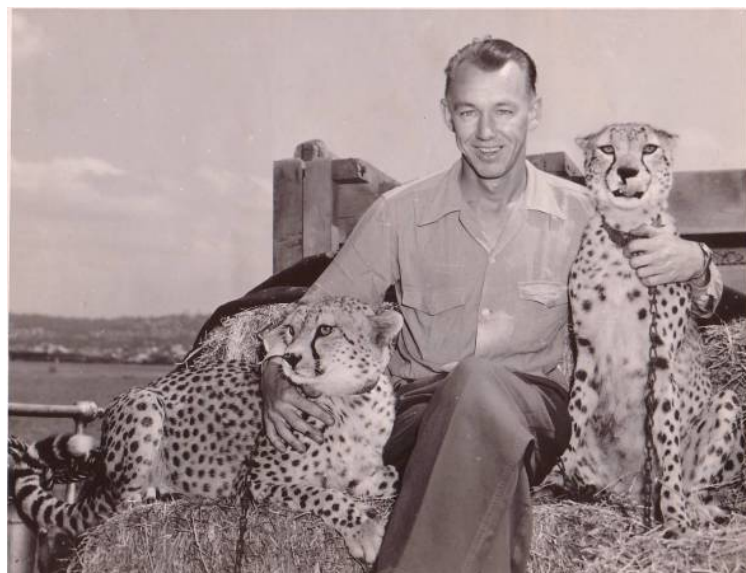
Jack James Pedersen and Shirley Mae Pedersen



Edward Thomsen, Jack James Pedersen and Victor Thomsen, Jr. (top step)



John Pedersen, "Princess Margaret" and Lillian Pedersen



Jack Pedersen in Africa with the cheetahs Mojah and Mbili, who appeared in the movie "Quo Vadis"



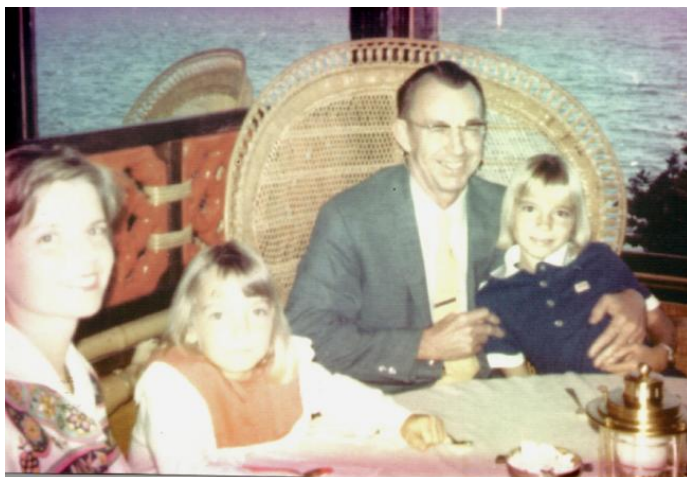
Shirley Schneider, "Princess Margaret" and Lillian Pedersen



Shirley Pedersen Schneider and George Schneider, 1951



Shirley Schneider and Mojah & Mbili



Christa, Ginger, Jack and Barbara Pedersen



*Lillian Nelson and John Pedersen
on their wedding day.*



Train depot in Niles, California.



*Lillian's design for curtain-
tiebacks.*

My grandmother, **Lillian Katrina Nelson Pedersen**, was the oldest daughter of Christine and James Nelson, and was born in 1899. I think she enjoyed growing up in Racine and helping to take care of her younger siblings. She always spoke happily of those times and of her parents. In 1919, she was working at the Star Restaurant as a waitress when she met John Pedersen, also the child of Danish immigrants, who had just returned from World War I. They lived in Racine with their families. When they married on June 14, 1919, they did not tell their families – they each simply returned home! As word got out of their marriage, John Pedersen's father Peder said it was time they grow up and go out on their own.

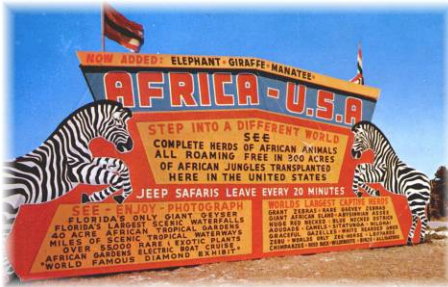
The promise of California and its wealth was very attractive to John Pedersen. Lillian and John set out for California, and John soon landed a job with the Southern Pacific Railway. The job did not pay well, so the young couple lived in a box car in Niles, California. They made their own furniture from railroad ties and used tumbleweed for stuffing. Also, many silent movies were filmed in Niles and the surrounding areas, and John and Lillian served as extras in many of those movies.

In 1922, Lillian was expecting their first child and desert life in Niles was proving difficult. My grandmother told me that each bedpost was placed in a pan of water so that the desert scorpions and spiders could not crawl into their beds. John sent her back to Racine to have their first child, Jack, who was born February 19, 1923 at a whopping 13 pounds.

My grandmother had a knack for decorating – creativity was always her strong point. She began to design and sew "curtain-tiebacks" in the shape of flowers to decorate their home. Friends and relatives liked them so much that she began to make them on request. John saw an opportunity for the curtain-tiebacks. They opened a small factory in the basement of their home on Spring Street in Racine,



Shirley and Jack in Fort Lauderdale.



Africa U.S.A. sign at the entrance in Boca Raton, Florida.

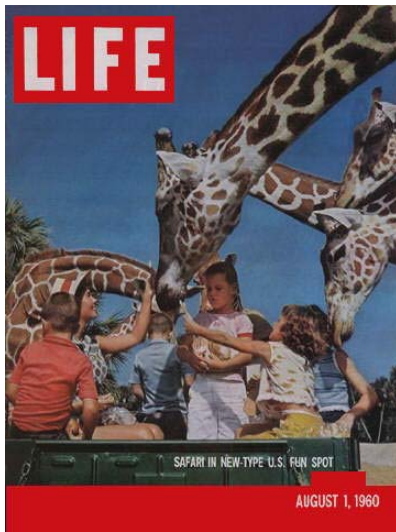
employing several relatives and friends. Soon their second child Shirley was born on March 1, 1926.

The curtain-tieback business took off, and the Unique Novelty Company was started. John Pedersen traveled to Chicago to visit the Sears-Roebuck and Montgomery-Ward department stores and the curtain-tiebacks were featured in their catalogs. He improved the manufacturing process and John was granted a patent for this new and innovative process to cut cloth – US patent #1,818,578.¹¹ Ever being the entrepreneurial couple, Lillian and John served lunch to their employees, usually hamburgers – they proved so popular that they began selling them to the public through a kitchen window, beating McDonald’s by several decades.

With the proceeds from the curtain-tieback business, John and Lillian began to buy land in the suburbs around Racine, and through a family effort, began to build small affordable homes for working families, what came to be known as the “Pedersen Addition”. When John fell off a roof and broke his back, Lillian was there to start swinging a hammer.

During the Depression, John and Lillian were in search of a warmer climate, especially for John’s injured back. Florida beckoned, and the Pedersen family spent their first year in the Tampa area. The next year they moved further south to the Fort Lauderdale area. After the land bust in the Depression, land and lots in Florida could not be given away. John and Lillian bought prime lots and tracks of lands for two or three dollars each. In the Wilton Manors area, he built many homes and stores. During the World War II building moratorium, they built “chicken coop” houses to raise chickens for the war effort, and as soon as the war was over, the houses were cleaned up and were ready to be sold to the returning GIs.

¹¹ See <http://www.freepatentsonline.com/1818578.html> for the original patent drawings.



Africa U.S.A. was featured on the cover of Life Magazine, beating out Disneyland in California.

John continued developing and building, but Lillian and her son Jack had a new dream to realize. They spotted a large tract of land in Boca Raton, Florida that was for sale by the city. Lillian imagined that a large botanical garden could be developed on the property. Always a talented gardener, she could make anything grow. Soon the idea grew into what would become Africa U.S.A., America's first cage-less African animal and amusement park. The park opened in 1953, after two years of construction and landscaping. Lillian and John planted thousands of trees and plants, some which survive to this day. They managed the park with their children, and even lived on the property, overlooking a waterfall that was created for the park. Africa U.S.A. featured African animals such as zebra, giraffe, elephants, gazelle, chimpanzees and many other animals.¹² John and Lillian even had a chimpanzee living in their home, and raised her as a child complete with clothing and a bicycle.

Soon the city of Boca Raton was growing too quickly for Africa U.S.A. With new neighborhoods now bordering the park, Lillian and John decided to sell the animals and the land. They sold and closed Africa U.S.A. in 1961, and retired to Lake Worth, Florida. But the adventures were not over. In 1962, John and Lillian, along with their son Jack and his family, sailed for Australia to see what the land "down under" could offer. Finding the country somewhat lacking and behind the American standard of living, they left in early 1963 and returned to Lake Worth, where they lived until 1972. Again, Australia beckoned and they lived there until 1974, when again they moved back to Lake Worth.

By this time, my grandparents were in their middle 70's and ready to relax a bit. But my grandmother's hands were never idle – she was always working on embroidery, crocheting or gardening, or perhaps playing the organ she so loved. Being a teenager at the time, I did not really want to wear that crocheted vest to



Lillian and John Pedersen on their 60th wedding anniversary with their dog Billy Boy

¹² See the website at www.africa-usa.com for more information on the park.



*Lillian and John Pedersen on their 60th
wedding anniversary, 1979*

school...and didn't, but I know she made it with love. My grandmother had such a great sense of humor – always teasing, making jokes, always in a good mood with a positive attitude. She also was an avid reader, liking biographies and her beloved Harlequin romance novels. She also liked her “stories” on television, the afternoon soap operas she never missed. I still see her in her garden, with her bonnet on, covered from head to toe with dirt, planting her flowers or redesigning some part of the yard.

My grandmother was very proud to be Danish, and always told me her family was from Jutland. She never provided any detail, and it amazes me that we are now able to see photographs of her parents and grandparents that she herself never saw. Both my grandparents spoke Danish, especially when we were not supposed to understand what they were saying. They would play a game at night where they would try to stump each other with Danish words. My grandmother dreamed of traveling to Denmark, but she never realized that dream. It made my opportunity to visit Denmark this past year that much more special.

My grandmother and I also inherited two Christensen physical traits that you may too have. On Christine's picture, you see what a high forehead she has. My grandmother had that, as I do and usually wear bangs to hide it a bit. Then there are the fingers...if you hold your two index fingers together, and they form a “V”, you have the Christensen fingers! My grandmother and I would show each other our crooked index fingers and proudly say “V for victory!”

My grandparents were always fun to be with. But we never called them “grandmother and grandfather.” To my sister Barbara and me, she was Noni and my grandfather was Buppa – nicknames my sister gave them when she was two years old that stuck. And my grandmother could be strict! I can still hear saying “You better mind your Noni”.

I think what I remember most was her kind heart towards animals, a trait I have certainly inherited. She spoke of all the pets they had as children, and how when a beloved cat was run-over by a car, her father immediately got her a new kitten. She helped me in 1974, when my family and I were moving back from Hawaii to Florida. We had adopted a cat, but my father insisted that the cat was staying behind in Hawaii. Well, I wrote my “Noni” a letter, and the cat flew back with to the mainland. She was fond of an expression that she twisted around to be funny – “Be dumb to kind animals.”

As the years went by, her health faltered some, and at the age of 85, she fell and broke her hip. Although they tried hip replacement, her advanced age did not allow a recovery, and she passed away in 1984.

Her creativity, work ethic, kindness and sense of humor are the things that still speak to me, some 23 years after her passing. Her wisdom and good Danish common-sense guides me to this day.

-Ginger L. Pedersen

Alma Nelson

married

Victor Emil Thomsen

October 18, 1920

Children: Edward Richard Thomsen (1922-1998), Victor Emil Thomsen, Jr. (1924), Betty Jane Thomsen (1926-2008), Marilyn Mae Thomsen (1930-2007), Beverly Ann Thomsen (1931-1984), Nancy Carol Thomsen (1934-2012)



Victor and Alma Thomsen



Victor Thomsen at age 17



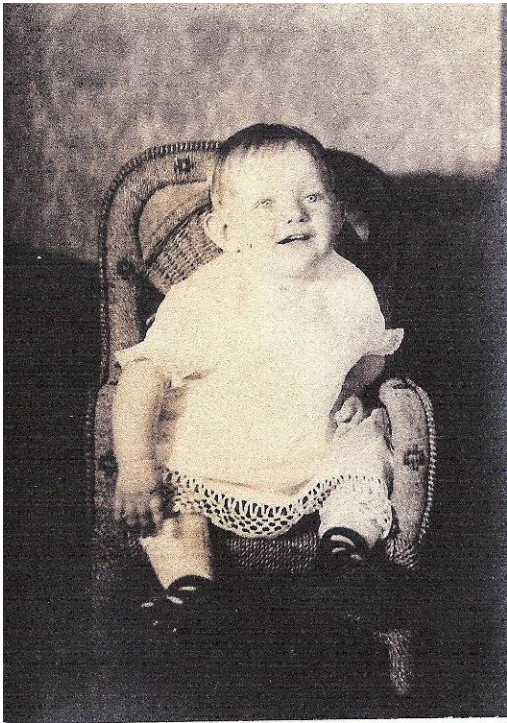
Margaret Albrektsen, Mary Nelson
and Victor Thomsen



Alma, Victor and Edward



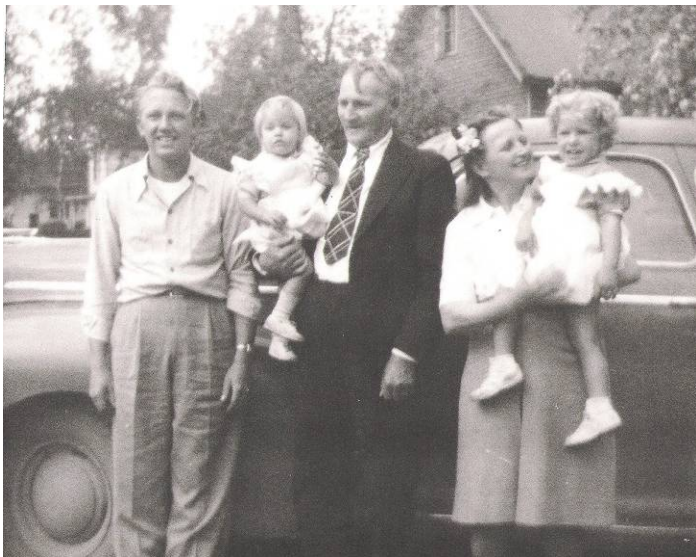
The Thomsen girls



Betty Thomsen at age one



Nancy Thomsen



Edward Thomsen, Sandra Thomsen, James Nelson, Alma Thomsen and Carol Thomsen – Four generations



Edward and Victor Thomsen, Jr.



Betty Thomsen & Marion Etheridge



Nancy Thomsen & Orville Morris



Betty Thomsen & Arthur Morgan



Marion & Beverly Etheridge



Nancy & Orville's children



Nancy & Orville 50th Anniversary



Alma Thomsen, Jeanne Nelson Studey and Dolores Munch



Alma displaying the catch from her favorite hobbies, fishing

Alma Nelson Thomsen was the first among the Nelson children to present a grandchild to her parents, with the birth of Edward Thomsen. Many children followed during the years. Her daughter, Betty Kilburn, writes:

“In response to your question about what my Mom and Dad did as a job, Mom didn't work away from home while we were growing up (six kids was enough). I believe she did work for a while in a vegetable canning factory before they were married. After Dad died in 1949, she went to work at Abbott Laboratories on an assembly line making intravenous sets (tubes, injection sites, needles, etc.) for about 13 years before retiring.

Dad was in construction--an Operating Engineer. He ran various equipment related to constructing--anything from houses, schools, and roads, to working on the Chicago Subway and the Chicago Filtration Plant plus other large projects such as a couple of Army Camps. I recall he was in Arkansas for six months or so building Fort Smith, and also in Indiana for months building a Camp there. When we were kids, we were the envy of the neighborhood kids when he would be moving his Steam Shovel from one site to another and come rumbling out Belvidere St.--the shovel didn't travel very fast, so we could run and climb up on it--great fun!”

We know too that Alma was a real traveler – the only child among the Nelson children who traveled to Denmark and met with our relatives there. She also visited my family when we were living in Hawaii in 1973. She called us and said she was on a senior citizen tour and gave us the flight number so we could meet her at the airport. This was in the days when you exited the plane by walking down the stairs. Off the plane came about 30 women with white hair and sweaters around their shoulders! She spotted us before we spotted her.

Her nephew Donald “Bud” Nelson lived with her for many years before his marriage in 1977, as he was serving as a deputy sheriff – this must have given her a good feeling to have a police officer in the house. I still have a cat ceramic bank she gave me in 1977, and I consider it one of my most prized possessions – I loved it at the time and still do. In later years Alma lived with her daughter Betty in Waukegan, Illinois and they continued traveling around the country together. I last saw Alma in 1993 when they visited us in Florida. She was always in a good mood, fun to be with and had a great smile.



Orville & Nancy Morris, Ed & Pearl Thomsen, Betty Morgan, Bill & Marilyn Kiaupa, Vic & Pat Thomsen

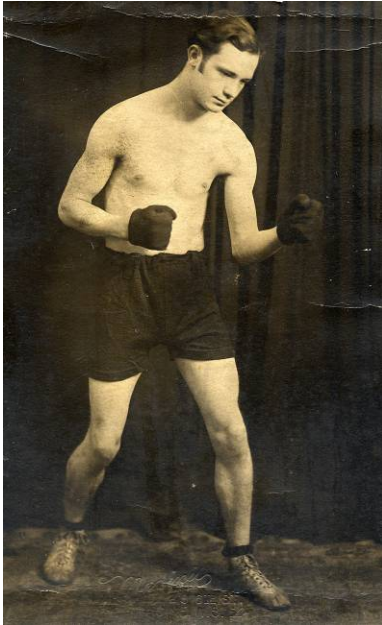
Agnes Nelson

married

George Peck

June 26, 1925

Children: Gloria June Peck (1936), George Peck, Jr. (1938-2016)



George Peck



Agnes, George and friends



Gloria and George Jr.



The Peck family on a visit to Florida



George and Agnes Peck



Agnes and Gloria



Gloria Peck & Donald Overdier



George Peck



Agnes Peck



Gloria Overdier & George Peck Jr.

Agnes Nelson Peck was born January 28, 1904 in Racine. Her daughter Gloria Overdier writes:

“She married George Peck who worked at American Motors (Nash) the majority of his life. Early in their marriage they had twin girls who did not survive and had to wait ten years before another child was born - Gloria in 1936. Two years later they had their second child George Jr. She was always a stay at home mom, but helped other people who needed something, such as an aunt who was in a home all her life. She'd take her out to buy clothes and other things she needed. She also had some interesting special foods she cooked, a meringue cake that everyone loved on special occasions and chop suey¹³ (nephew Jackie's favorite - he always requested it on a visit).

The Peck family did a lot of moving around Racine. George built houses in his spare time and when a new one was done we'd move into it and sell the previous one. Sometimes the new one was just next door.

Later in life they bought a cottage in Chetek, Wisconsin where they spent a part of the year. It was a favorite place for the grandchildren to visit and do some fishing. Finally they moved to Lake Worth, Florida to be in a warmer climate and to be near Agnes's sisters.

Their son George, Jr. lived with them until their death. He never married and now lives in Ashville, North Carolina. Gloria was born in Racine and left only when she went to college in Madison, Wisconsin. After graduating, she married Don Overdier and they moved to the Twin Cities Area in Minnesota where he worked as an Electrical Engineer. Gloria and Don had three children, David, Susan and Kathryn. Gloria was also a stay at home mom until the children grew up and then went into real estate and tax preparation. After Don's retirement, they now live in the Cary/Raleigh NC area where all their children and grandchildren also live.”

I remember “Aunt Aggie” quite well as they lived just a few miles from my grandparents in Lake Worth, Florida. Every time we had dinner there, we had the famous Chop-Suey and we all loved it. She tried to show my Mom how to make it, but it was never as good as when she made it. I also liked to visit them because they had a Boston terrier named Buster.

In later years, Agnes and George enjoyed their retirement. Aunt Aggie also was very talented with handicrafts and did a lot of crocheting. She was a quiet and kind person – I don't ever recall seeing her upset or having a cross word with anyone. I think her daughter characterized her very well, that she was always there to help others.

¹³ See recipe section for Aunt Agnes's Chop Suey recipe

Clara Nelson
married
Edward Bridgette
1927

Children: Donald Nelson (1926-2008), Ted Bridgette (1942-2008)



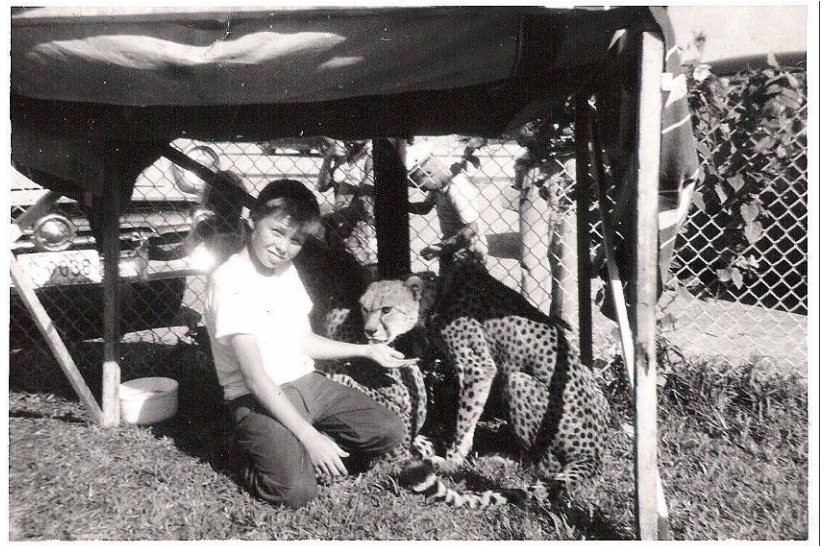
Clara Bridgette & Donald Nelson



Clara Bridgette & Ronald Bridgette



Ronald Bridgette at Africa USA



Ronald Bridgette at Africa USA



Donald Nelson



Barbara & Ronald Bridgette

According to Mary Nelson, her sister, **Clara Nelson**, was James Nelson's favorite. A pretty dark haired girl, she was very lively and full of fun.

Don Nelson was born in Aunt Lillian's house with a mid-wife. Clara then left her son with her parents and left town shortly after Don was born.

When she left, James and Christine Nelson were devastated. They adopted Don and shortly thereafter the 1929 Depression dealt another blow. James Nelson lost his business and his home. The rest of the time Don lived with his grandparents, James and Christina moved a lot from one rental home to another. Don laughed and said they always left when rent was due and they had no money.

Mary Nelson was 16 when Don was born and she helped her mother take care of him. Mary lived in a flat upstairs of her parents until she married. Mary walked Don to school in the morning when he was in grade school because Don would get into fights with some of the neighborhood boys. Then Mary would go to work. Mary also helped with the discipline which included washing his mouth out with soap and swatting him with a yardstick.

Ted Bridgett was married and divorced when he married Clara Nelson. No children from first marriage. Ted was working in Michigan City, Indiana at a country club as a cook, when he married Clara.

Clara and her husband Ted Bridgette moved to Racine. When Christine Nelson died in 1936, Don was sent to live with his mother and her husband. He was 10 years old. Ted used to take Don with him when he visited his ex-mother-in-law.

Ted used to drink too much and forget where he parked his car, lose his keys and break a window to get into house. Don would have to fix window. Ted would call from one of the bars and Don would have to go bring him home. Don was 11 or 12 at the time and had to learn to drive in order to get Ted home. From everything he has said Don really liked Ted. Ted was always good to Don.

Don and Ted drove taxicabs in Racine. Don and Ted also had a sporting goods store in Racine but it is not known how long they had the store.

Ted put most of the water pipes into the Pedersen Addition homes, and he dug the trenches by hand. All the houses had running water. Tom Smith and Mary Nelson took Don to Mauston, Wisconsin with them to visit Tom's grandmother before they were married. Mary treated Don like a little brother and Tom and Mary took him along whenever they were taking a drive.

When Clara went to the hospital to give birth to Ronald she was very happy. When she came home with the baby, she was very depressed and she was never the same, according to Don. Post-partum depression was not an identified illness back then.



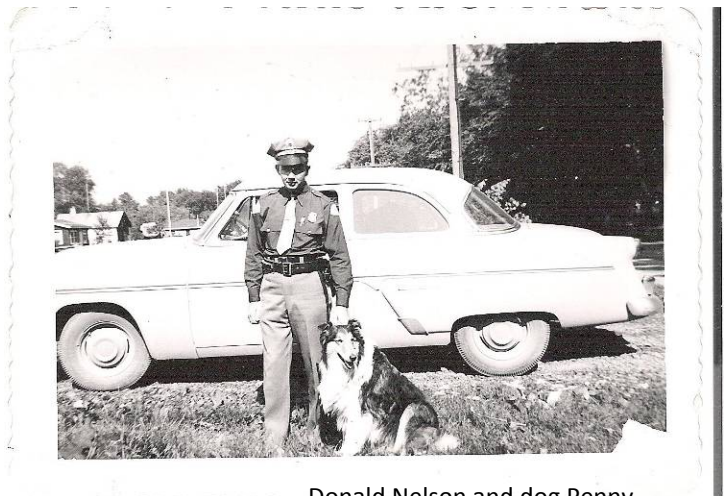
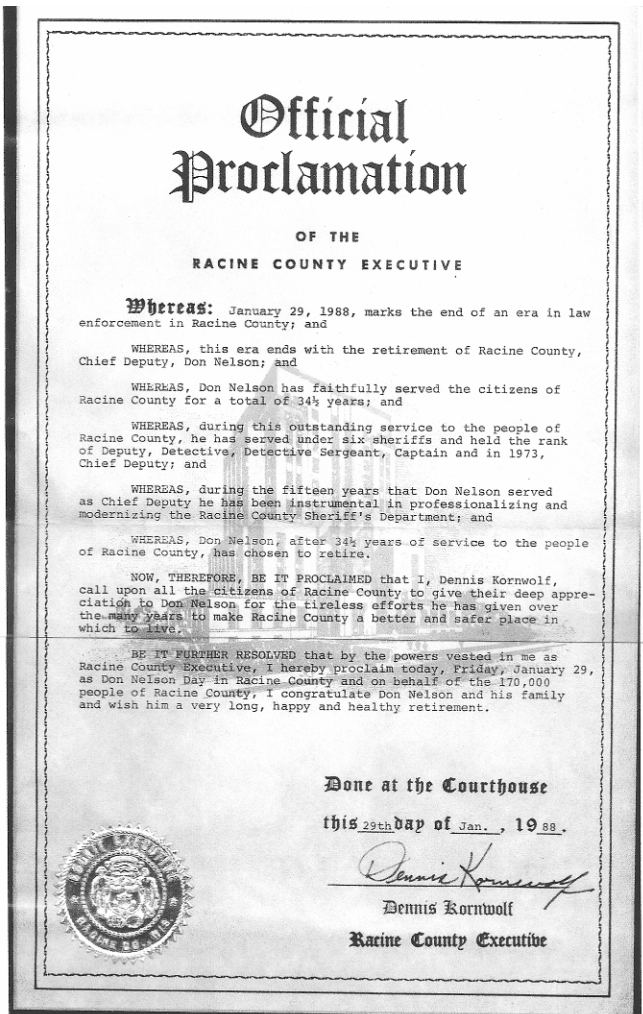
Donald and Elsie Nelson

Henry Donald Keith Nelson is the name on Don's birth certificate. He found the birth certificate in Grandpa Nelson's papers when Grandpa died. Don never knew that his first name was Henry.

When Tom and Mary Smith moved their family to Florida they gave their dog, Penny to Clara's family. Ronnie, Clara's younger son loved that dog a lot and after many years, he and Dolores reminisced about the Collie they both loved.

I remember Aunt Clara being a very loving person and always smiling. She always had something nice to say to me whenever I saw her at family gatherings. I am sure she would have been a different person with the medication that is available today. According to Elaine Nelson, Clara had a beautiful singing voice and used to sing all time as a young girl.

James Nelson was raised by his grandparents and turned out to be a very good man. Donald Nelson turned out to be a wonderful man because of the love and care given by his grandparents, his Aunt Mary and the many other family members who were involved in his early years starting with his Aunt Lillian, who offered her home to her sister, Clara for the birth of her son.



Donald Nelson and dog Penny



Don Nelson, Dolores Munch, Alma Thomsen, Mary Smith, Elsie Nelson, Thomas Smith

Mary Nelson

married

Thomas R. Smith

August 10, 1934

Children: Patricia Carol Smith (1937) Dolores Jeanne Smith (1938-2013)



Thomas Smith, groom, Cathryn Smith, Maid of Honor, Tom's sister, Shirley Pedersen, flower girl, Mary Nelson, Bride, Betty Thomsen, flower girl



Thomas, Patricia, Dolores, and Mary

Thomas Reuben Smith (March 26, 1913 – July 27, 1986)

Thomas Reuben Smith was born in Mauston, Wisconsin, to Clayton Owen Smith and Katherine Svoboda Smith. Part of his childhood was spent on the farm his parents had in Lemonweir, Wisconsin, a small town next to Mauston. He is first mentioned in the U.S. Census in 1920 for Lemonweir Township in Juneau County, Wisconsin with his parents. The census was taken in January that year and Thomas is 6 years old and his father's occupation is listed as farmer doing general farming. His cousin, Catherine 'Toots' LaMack was one of his best friends. There are several photos of him and Toots taken in Lemonweir. Even after his parents moved to Racine, Wisconsin, his heart was in Mauston where his grandparents, Reuben and Ella Smith, had their farm. He enjoyed the taste of milk straight from the cow, something my mother, sister and I did not like at all. He always loved the fresh corn and berries from the farm that we would have for dinner. There was an old organ in the living room at the farm that Tom would play for his grandmother. Thomas had a sister, Cathryn, who was seven years younger than him.

Thomas was a gifted musician and could play almost any instrument. I know he played the piano, organ, trumpet, violin, guitar, accordion, and ukulele. There probably were other instruments but those mentioned were the ones I remember seeing him play. Thomas started piano lessons at the age of 3. One of his teachers was his cousin Clara LaMack. Clara would have been 15 when Tom was 3 so she may have been his first teacher. For many years as a child, he always practiced before and after school, about four hours a day.



The Tommy Smith Trio featuring Mary Smith on the drums and Tom on the Piano

From the age of 16, while still in high school and following High School Graduation, Thomas Smith was playing piano in nightclubs during the week in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Kenosha was where the Al Capone gang hung out. Tom told stories of the 'Capone boys' coming into the club where he worked and shooting their Tommie guns into the ceiling, stating he was very thankful that he played the piano and it was big enough to hide behind. He said that on the whole most of the 'gangsters' were nice guys who usually gave the bands good tips. He must have graduated High School in January of 1930 because he was registered at the Sherwood Music School of Chicago. The Sherwood Music School was a college of music offering professional degrees in performance to students. Thomas studied at the Sherwood Music School Extension Department in Racine for his Piano Teaching Certificate taking courses such as Piano-Harmony and the History of Music. Prior to receiving his Teaching Certificate he received a diploma for Counterpoint, Interpretation, Appreciation of Music and Technique. The 1930 U.S. Census lists Tom, his parents and sister Cathryn living in the house at 626 Belmont, Racine, Wisconsin. The census is taken in April and Tom has just turned 17.



Wedding of Dolores & Emil Munch
Neil Hunkeler, Thomas Smith, Emil Munch
Patricia Hunkeler, Mary Smith, Dolores Munch

At the age of 17, Thomas taught piano to young students during the day. He had developed a love of jazz and was talented enough to be asked to tour with one of the bands that toured nationally, but his parents said no, he was too young. Tom also played locally in Racine with the Bob Miller Band (1931-1933). The band played at the Hotel Racine on Saturday nights, at private parties, a club called the Beach, and were also featured on radio station WRJN. His mother finally gave up her dream of Tom being

a concert pianist. He met Mary Nelson while playing piano at a party around 1932. He was about 19 and Mary was three years older and her friends teased her saying she was robbing the cradle. But, because of his work experience, Thomas was by far the more mature of the two.



Emil Munch & Dolores Smith wedding

Mary Nelson (April 2, 1910 – February 17, 1997)

Mary Nelson was born in Racine, Wisconsin, to James Carl and Christina Christensen Nelson. She had four sisters and one brother, and she was the youngest. Mary said she was 'sickly' as a child and she talked about being sent to an "open-air" school for a while. I have since learned that the 'Open Air School' was on State Street and was a place where children with TB were sent. Mary helped her mother with housework and also taking care of her sister Clara's son Donald. Her father was a very strict and very domineering man who liked to shout. Mary always stood up to her father when she was in her teens, especially if she felt he was being mean to her mother. Mary always believed that her father was extremely strict with her because of her older sister becoming pregnant. James Nelson was shattered that one of his daughters would do that. Clara had gotten pregnant and would not say whom the father was. After the birth of her son, Donald in 1926, she gave her baby to her mother to raise and left town. Back in the 1920s postnatal depression was not recognized as a legitimate illness but now the family realizes that is what Clara suffered from. According to her son Don, she had the same reaction years later after she married Edward "Ted" Bridgette and gave birth to another son, Ronald, in 1942. She was very happy all through the pregnancy and even on the way to the hospital to give birth, but when she came home she was a changed person. In 1936, when Don was 10 years old his grandmother, Christina Nelson died and Don went to live with his mother and his stepfather Ted Bridgette.



25th Anniversary of Mary & Tom Smith in the middle of photo with flower girls Shirley Pedersen Schneider and Betty Thomsen Morgan



Photo taken at 25th Anniversary party, Joni Hunkeler, granddaughter, Betty & Art Morgan & Mary Smith

Mary had to leave school and go to work to help her family after she finished the eighth grade. This was in 1924 and Mary was 14 years old. She said her father did not think that girls needed to be educated. Mary worked for her sister Lillian's husband Jack Pedersen at his tieback factory, which was in the basement of Jack Pedersen's house at 3500 Spring Street. Mary would come home from work and take over the care of Don from her mother. Don was born in 1926 when Mary was 16. Don said that when he was in the first grade, Mary would walk him to school so that he would not get into a fight with some of the other boys. He remembers throwing a pound of butter at his Aunt Mary and another time she got so angry with him she dunked his head into a bucket of cold water. It was not easy holding down a job and also taking responsibility for a baby when you are 16. Don was very close to his Aunt Mary through the years, always remembering her birthday and sending Mary and Tom a Danish Kringle from Racine at Christmas.

When Mary was dating Tom her parents moved to a house at 1417 Prospect Avenue. Mary lived in the flat upstairs and her parents lived in the downstairs flat with their grandson Donald. One time Tom came over to visit Mary and left his new Model-A convertible out front. It had chrome handles and Don decided it would look better with red handles, so he got a can of red paint and painted all the handles red. They were still sticky when Tom came out to get into his car. Don was hiding waiting for Tom's reaction. His only comment was that the door handles sure looked bright. According to Don, Tom always had time for him and would take Don with him if he had to go to the store. Tom was a very low-key guy who hardly ever got angry. Mary lived by herself upstairs until she married Tom in 1934.



Tom & Mary Smith - Christmas in Florida

Thomas Reuben Smith and Mary Nelson married August 10, 1934 in Racine, Wisconsin

Thomas and Mary were married August 10, 1934 in Racine, Wisconsin. He was 21 and she was 24. They moved to Flint, Michigan, in Genesee



Tom & Mary Christmas at their 50th
Wedding Anniversary



Joel & Dana Munch

County after they married. Don Nelson remembers that they moved to Michigan because Tom had a job lined up. Tom went to work for General Motors, Fisher Body, in their tank division in the design department. He also gave piano lessons to earn extra money. Tom said that at one time he went down to the US Army recruiting office to join the Army like many of his friends. The recruiter told him that if he joined he would be put right back into the same job he was doing for Fisher Body, which was designing tanks. The only difference would be that he would be a Private in the Army, which meant a pay cut. So Tom decided not to enlist in the army.

Now that I am researching the Smith family I find that part of the Smith family lived in Genesee County, Michigan. Tom's great uncle George Smith was born in Michigan and his grandfather Reuben Smith's family lived there for about eight years from the time Reuben was two until he was ten. It is possible that one of Clayton's uncles, who still lived in Michigan, helped Tom get his job with General Motors.

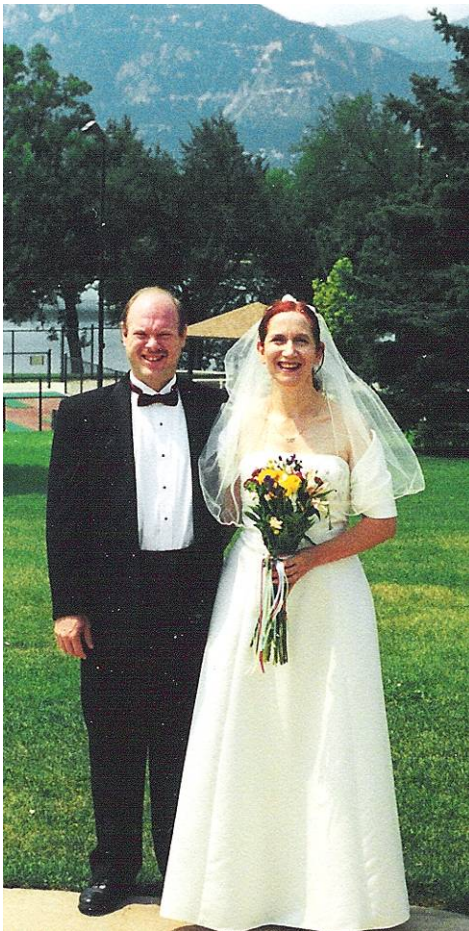
Mary was very lonely away from her family for the first time especially with Tom working two jobs. He always played the piano on weekends, which included Friday nights. His entire life he would work two jobs, his regular day job and then he would play the piano in the evening at a nightclub. Tom got Mary a beautiful long-haired black cat, Flossy, and then a dog that was a mixture of German Shepherd and Collie, Sally, to keep her company but it was hard. She was very shy and did not make friends easily. With four sisters, she always had plenty of company when she was at home, but Michigan was a long way away. She would take the train to Racine to visit whenever she could.

Mary became pregnant in 1936 and she and Tom were very happy. Unfortunately, there was a complication and Mary lost the baby, a boy, in her fifth month. Mary and Tom were told that she would not be able to have any children. This same year Mary's mother died, May 20, 1936. Mary always regretted she had not been with her mother when she was ill. Christina Nelson had a stroke in early 1936 and was doing well and starting to exercise. Her doctor recommended that she walk every day to get her body to function properly again. Christina was lucky she had no lasting effects from the first stroke. Mary could not travel to be with her mother because of her pregnancy. Then Christina had another stroke, which took her life.

Thomas Reuben Smith and Mary Nelson have two children.

In early 1937, the doctor who was taking care of Mary talked to Tom and Mary and said that he had a patient who had to give her baby up for adoption and would they be interested in adopting the baby. They said yes and the doctor, through the State and an attorney, helped to arrange the adoption. Beverly Ann Poppinger was born May 11, 1937. Tom and Mary named their new daughter Patricia Carol Smith and took her home from the hospital when she was only three days old.

Well, the doctor was wrong! Mary became pregnant when Patricia was just seven months old. In September 1938, Dolores Jeanne was added to the family. Mary was an extremely gifted seamstress and could sew beautiful clothes from any type of material. For years she made dresses, skirts, blouses and even winter coats and leggings for her two girls. Mary also had a flair for decorating and her home always had those special touches that made it very attractive. She made curtains, table covers, and slipcovers. She also had ideas on changing things around the house and in



Kenneth & Lydia Munch

the process Tom became a very good carpenter. His first project of any note was to build a bay window in their home in Mount Morris, Michigan. I have few memories of Michigan and I think what I remember are stories that were told over and over. Mary used to tell about the time her three-year-old daughter, Dolores came running to the house and trying to tell her mother something but she could not understand what the little girl was saying. Finally Mary followed her daughter outside and across a field to an old abandoned refrigerator. When Mary opened the door of the old refrigerator her four-year-old daughter, Patricia was inside turning blue. The girls had been playing with the refrigerator, each of them taking turns sitting inside and the door had closed on Patricia and the three year old was not big enough to open it. They were very lucky, Mary got Patricia out in time and she was fine.

Now that his wife, Christina had died and his grandson, Donald was living with his mother, James Nelson had time to visit his youngest daughter in Michigan. One story Mary told was about when her father, James Nelson was visiting and helping Tom with a building project. The story involves her youngest daughter, Dolores playing with a pair of scissors after being told by her Grandpa not to play with the scissors. She was sticking them between pieces of flooring and ended up breaking the tip off of one side of the scissors. Then the little girl hid from her grandfather under the bed and would not come out. He was very angry about the scissors being broken and was threatening to spank her, but Mary came to the rescue of her daughter. Tom's sister, Cathryn, also came to visit the family in Michigan. The girls really enjoyed Cathryn's visits.

Mary also took her two daughters and traveled by train to Racine to visit her family several times over the nine years they lived in Michigan. After Tom died, her daughter Dolores took Mary to Mount Morris, Michigan where they found the house she had lived in, but the bay window had been removed. According to Mary the window always leaked and she was not surprised that the window had been taken out.

According to Mary, her two daughters had been sitting on their swings in the back yard swearing at their dolls. They were not allowed to use swear words and when Mary caught them she put a rope around each girl's waist and tied them to the dog's line in the back yard. Poor Mary, she thought it would be punishment but her daughters had found a new game to play. They both ran back and forth barking as loud as they could, pretending to be dogs. The girls also used to dance on top of their father's car. During those times, Mary said she would not look and would not holler at them for fear that the girls would fall off and really hurt themselves. Tom and Mary's little girls really enjoyed performing.

In 1943, Tom and Mary moved the family to Waukegan, Illinois, for a year. Mary's sister Alma and her husband Victor Thomsen lived in Waukegan. This home had a pull-down ladder in the hall to go up into the attic. The attic had a floor and the two girls would play up there. There was a small neighborhood store on the corner a block away where Mary could send the girls for a can of soup for lunch. Mary and Tom had a small garden and their daughter, Dolores, loved fresh vegetables. According to Mary she found Dolores in the kitchen peeling and eating a whole clove of garlic thinking it was an onion. Dolores said that this might explain why I am not very fond of anything that has a strong taste of garlic. There were two dogs and at least two cats and some chickens. Pat and Dolores each had a pet chicken and their dog Sally would let the chickens ride on her back.



Mark & Susan Munch

There was also one memorable event with Mary's cat, Flossy, a beautiful longhair black female cat. She was very sick and would not eat anything fixed for her, including hamburger and chicken, for a week and everyone was afraid the cat would die. Just when everyone had given up hope they found the cat up on the table eating the muskmelon Mary had cut and put on the table for dessert. After that Flossy ate some chicken soup and was back to normal in another week. The only thing Tom and Mary could figure out was that the cat had a very sore throat and was afraid to swallow regular cat food but the soft, cool melon did not hurt so that now Flossy was not afraid to swallow. Whatever the reason, Flossy was on the road to recovery.

Another time the two girls were in the back yard playing with their friends when Patricia decided to turn a wooden barrow upside down and do a dance on it. Unfortunately old wooden barrows are not good for tap dancing. Patricia fell through the barrow and got long cuts on her legs from the nails sticking into the barrow. There was also a roller skating rink in Waukegan that Patricia and Dolores went to with their cousins. Pat was the better skater while Dolores stayed to the outside near the railing to avoid falling down. One of the last things the family did in Waukegan was to have Patricia's birthday party outside in the yard beside the house. Her birthday is in May and it was a beautiful warm sunny day. There is a photo of the girls at that party in the book.

Tom and Mary with their daughters lived in Racine for a total of eight years. Patricia went to the first half of second grade in Waukegan and Dolores went to the first half of first grade when Tom and Mary moved to Racine. The second half of first grade for Dolores and second grade for Patricia was spent at Bartlett School in Racine County. The family moved into a house Tom helped to build for Mary's brother-in-law Jack Pedersen. Jack had several houses built on land outside of the city of Racine and the development was referred to as Pedersen Addition. While Tom and Mary lived in Pedersen addition, Tom built one or two houses on the street, according to Don Nelson. The man who ran the little neighborhood store on the corner of Pedersen Road and Spring Street was Emil Walters, Edna's Nelson's brother. Edna was married to Christ Nelson, Mary's brother. Mary's sister, Agnes, her husband George Peck and their two kids lived on the street along with Tom's sister Cathryn, her husband Lester and two kids and Tom's cousin, Clyde Rowland, his wife Mae and their kids. Clyde had a beautiful willow tree in the front yard and the little girls used to play under the tree with their dolls.

It was a nice place to grow up for there were lots of kids to play with and family all around. Everyone walked to school every day, which seemed like it was 'miles' away, but in reality was only about a mile. They had to be on time for school as it was on the other side of the railroad tracks and if they were late the long freight train would come and they would be stuck waiting for 50 to 60 freight cars to pass. Bartlett school had only three rooms that held school classes for first through eighth grades. The first floor was one large room and grades one through four were all in the same room divided into groups. Upstairs, grades five and six were in one room and seven and eight in another. It all worked out very well. Mary was active in the Mother's Club at school and one year Mary was in a play about poisoned mushrooms where she died by eating some of them. It was a comedy and not true but her daughters have never liked mushrooms.

In the winter the ice in the plowed fields would be like walking on rubber. I remember asking the Jewell Tea man to give us a ride one cold day. He refused, of course. Everyone got deliveries from Jewell Tea so we all knew the drivers but rules were rules and he could take no riders. I also remember one year rescuing a dog from a trap someone had set by the small stream. Actually, I did not do the rescue but ran to the nearest house and got someone to come open the trap with a large stick or metal pipe. Then when I told my mother she raised a big fuss, I think she even called the sheriff. After that, signs were posted on the banks of the creek stating that it was illegal to put animal traps near the creek where children might get hurt. You could always count on my mother to go to bat for us kids.

Out in Pedersen Addition, everyone played in the road in front of the houses or down the street under the huge willow tree. The family dog Sally was very protective of the girls. She would always lie down in the middle of the road if Patricia and Dolores were playing there. She also chased other dogs away from the cat Flossy. One summer they invented a new game by getting inside a large round cement septic tank and hanging on while rolling around in a field. The bad part was falling out, especially if there was broken glass. This time it was Dolores coming to Mary with a gash in her leg.

Tom and Mary took the girls on several visits to see my Mary's brother and his wife, Uncle 'Kissy' and Aunt Edna. His name was actually Christ but all the kids called him 'Kissy'. They lived in Union Grove and later in Sturtevant and whenever Tom drove out there it would either rain or snow or the wind would be blowing very hard. Tom was not fond of driving in that kind of weather but it became a family joke that if you wanted rain all you had to do was plan a visit to Aunt Edna's house.

On visits to Mary's sister Clara and her husband Ted we kids always had a great time. They lived out in the country and there was a lot of room to run and play. Ted was a cook by profession and he roasted sweet corn and grilled hamburgers. It was wonderful. Ted and Clara were very easy going and it was fun to visit them. When Tom and Mary moved to Florida in 1951 they gave their dog, Penny to Ted and Clara and their young son Ronnie who let the dog sleep on his bed at night.

Tom and Mary would drive down to Waukegan, a town about 30 miles from Racine, to visit Mary's sister, Alma and her husband Victor for family holiday parties. Alma's youngest daughter, Nancy was about the same age as Pat and Dolores and they always had fun with her. The main idea was for the girls to stay out of the way so the grownups could talk. Sometimes Alma's older daughters, Marilyn and Beverly would take the younger girls roller skating to get them out of the house so the parents could visit without a lot of interruption.

In 1946, Tom and Mary decided to move to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida where my mother's sister Lillian and her husband Jack Pedersen lived. In the middle of a snowstorm they left Racine and drove south. They rented half of a duplex my Jack had and lived there while Tom looked for work. Patricia and Dolores registered for school in Ft. Lauderdale. Jack Pedersen took the girls out to cut down a Pine tree for Christmas and on Christmas day he took them to the beach.

Tom and Mary stayed in Florida for a little over two months. Tom had counted on getting a job playing piano but the Musician's Union in Southern Florida was closed and he could not get a job. So they packed up

and drove back to Racine. The entire stay in Florida including the travel took three months. Mary and Tom and the girls moved in with Mary's father, James Nelson for the rest of that school year. Pat and Dolores went to Howell School. Both Howell School and James Nelson's house have been torn down. Dolores thought it was very exciting going to three schools in one year but Patricia did not like it at all. The worst part of living with James Nelson was the lack of a bathroom. His little house had running water but in 1947 you still had to go outside to an outhouse to go to the bathroom. As if that was not bad enough, the outhouse was on the rear of the property next to a huge junkyard. It was very scary for the little girls. As soon as school ended Tom moved the family into an upstairs flat on Taylor Avenue.

Flossy, the black cat was still with the family but Sally, the big dog, was gone. Mary did not like being alone at night with her two little girls so Tom and Mary brought home a Collie puppy. It is not easy to train a dog when you have to carry her up and down the outside steps until she got big enough to manage the steps.

While living in the upstairs flat, Tom bought a lot on the south side of Racine where there was a new grade school and started to build a new home for his family. James Nelson did not think that his son-in-law Tom was capable of building a house but the house still looks good 55 years later. On weekends Tom would take Dolores with him to work on the house. He gave Dolores a little hammer of her own and let her help by shoveling sand and gravel into a small cement mixer he used to mix mortar for the cement block basement. Tom poured the cement floor of the basement and also made a cement driveway and the sidewalk in front of the house. Pat did not share that enthusiasm for building things and would stay home.

Mary and Tom moved into the house before the inside walls were done and the family lived in the basement for a couple weeks while the walls were plastered. Mary put sheets around the bathroom so it could be used. Living there while the rest of the work was done must have been hard but Mary never complained. The house had a large bay window in the kitchen for a large table and chairs. There was a nice sized living room and two bedrooms and a bath. There was also a full basement with the washing machine and all Tom's tools were also kept there. We also had a player piano down there that all the kids loved to play. A favorite game at the time was a board game called 'Go To The Head Of The Class.' Pat was always the teacher as she was the oldest, or maybe she just liked to take charge. The kids in the neighborhood also got together and played the game of Monopoly. Everyone loved that game so it was played several times a week during the summer. Pat and Dolores used the basement of the house to practice tap dancing, ballet, and baton. Patricia was really good at these activities and was especially good at acrobatics. Dolores was in it for fun and tried not to embarrass her sister by dropping the baton during recitals.

One day while walking home from school through the empty lot down the block from Dolores stopped to look at some boys playing around a small fire. The boys were throwing snakes into the fire. Dolores tried to rescue the small garter snakes and the boys of course hit her and pushed her away. The next day in school there was an announcement over the speakers that the boys involved in the incident were to report to the principal's office. Mary had gone to school that morning and complained

to the principal about what had happened. The boys had to apologize to her daughter and were told to never do it again. Another time Dolores saved a little mouse from being hit by snowballs and ran home with it. Mary put the little mouse into a cardboard box and put the box on top of the kitchen wastebasket. That was a stroke of luck for when the mouse ate his way through the box he fell into the wastebasket and could not get out. Mary put the mouse back outside. According to Mary her mother Christine Nelson never killed anything, even sweeping bugs and spiders outside instead of killing them.

Halloween was a good time just for kids back in 1940s and 1950s. Back then grownups did not have parties on Halloween like they do now. In Racine the kids actually went out two nights. The first night they got pennies and the second night they got candy. Tom and Mary also gave Halloween parties for their girls and their friends. Dolores remembers bobbing for apples in a big laundry tub out in Pedersen Addition where some of the boys stuck their whole head in the water to get an apple. The best party ever was on Gilson where the party plans were kept secret from the girls. Pat was 11 and Dolores was 10. Mary led everyone down to the basement blindfolded and they had to sit on chairs in a circle in the dark. Then Tom passed around peeled grapes, cooked spaghetti and some jello-like stuff. Of course, he waited until everyone had handled everything in the dark and then he told everyone they were eyeballs, brains and a heart. The screams were outstanding. It was a great party.

We were close to our grandparents and all of the aunts and uncles and cousins. We also made trips up north to Mauston, Wisconsin to visit our Great Grandma Smith, my father's grandmother. Now I know her name, Sarah Ellen 'Ella' Smith. She lived on a farm and it was always an adventure. I remember very little about the farm except the railroad tracks before we arrived at the farm and the mosquitoes in the hills when we would go out to collect berries. My father used to play the old organ at the farm and I remember the house smelled like sweet milk. My sister and I would always be delegated to go up on the bluffs near the farm to pick berries for dessert. What I remember about the bluffs are all the mosquito bites we would get. There was also an old horse that we were allowed to get on and we would be led around the pasture for a short ride.

Mary and Tom visited the most with Mary's sister Agnes and her husband George. Agnes and Mary were very close. Like Tom, George also worked on building houses on weekends and during the week he worked at the Nash automobile plant in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Agnes and George had a daughter, Gloria, just a year older than Patricia and a son, George, Junior, who was the same age as Dolores. The four cousins played well together. In the summer the four kids would go swimming together at one of Racine's public pools.

Mary's father, James Nelson and her brother and sisters usually got together for Thanksgiving. They would take turns cooking the dinner and each year it would be at a different house. Tom did not eat chicken or turkey and hated the smell of it cooking so when it was their turn to have Thanksgiving he always found something to do outside. When Tom and Mary moved to Florida the family would go out to eat on Thanksgiving or just have ham, so the smell of turkey would not be in the house.

On Christmas Eve Mary's brother and sisters would get together for a party. The party moved to a different home each year. Tom always ended up playing piano and everyone would sing. The kids and grownups drew

names for exchanging presents. Mary and Tom and their girls had Christmas morning at home, just the four of them with the dog and cats. Christmas afternoon was spent with Tom's parents, Katherine and Dick Smith and his sister, Cathryn, her husband, Lester and their two children, Kathy and Lester, Jr. His mother Katherine was a great cook and she would cook Christmas dinner.

The fourth of July was a big time holiday in Racine. There was a parade in the morning and in the afternoon there was a carnival in the street in front of the high school with the street closed to traffic. The kids would all walk or take the city bus to the carnival early in the day and that night they would meet their parents for a picnic in the park. Then they would take a blanket and walk over a bridge in the park to watch fireworks.

The night Mary's father, James Nelson, died Mary's sister Agnes with her husband George and their children, Gloria and George, Jr. came over to Mary's home. The four children played army in the basement and had a great time staying up late. Mary and her sister Agnes sat upstairs and talked. Tom and George went to the hospital to be with James Nelson. Mary and Agnes could not watch their father die and chose to stay home with their children and sent their husbands to the hospital. After the funeral for James Nelson, everyone gathered at George and Agnes' house. There was a lot of laughing about Grandpa and the things he did and said and a lot of talk of things that had happened over the years. This was the second death in November 1949 for the family. Three weeks earlier Victor Thomsen died in Waukegan the night before his daughter's wedding. He was the husband of Mary's sister Alma. In the month of November 1949 there had been one wedding and two funerals.

The family needed some closure and it was a great party with Tom playing the piano and everyone singing. Tom entertained the kids by playing and singing the "bathtub song." "Nancy, where are you going? Upstairs to take a bath. Your form is like a toothpick and your head is like a tack. Nancy stepped in the bathtub, she slipped on the soap. Oh my goodness, oh my soul, there goes Nancy down the hole. Nancy, where are you going?" Of course he had to sing it over and over using each child's name. The next year, 1950, Tom bought two adjoining lots two blocks over from the house the family was living in on Gilson. Tom built one small two-bedroom house first and then sold the house on Gilson and moved the family into the one on Dwight. The big deal with this move was moving the television set. Not many people owned one in 1950 so it was moved to the car while everyone in the neighborhood was out working in their yards and could see the TV. Getting the television set was another story. Pat had a boyfriend whose parents bought a television set and she was sure he would not come over to our house again to see her if we did not have a television set of our own. That is the kind of parents Mary and Tom were. They went out and bought one of the sets, a 12-inch screen, measured diagonally. It was in a huge blond wood cabinet. You guessed it; Pat and her friends seldom watched it. On the other hand Dolores thought it was great, especially the army training films that were on late at night along with the commercials for the 'Magic Slicer/Dicer' that you could send for. While the family lived in the one house on Dwight, Tom built a two-story house on the lot next door. This was the first and only two-story house Tom built and Mary wanted to live in that house. But that winter was especially cold and their daughter Dolores had very bad sinus infections. Tom and Mary decided it was time to move to a warmer place. Tom

always had poor circulation and really felt the cold. Mary always kept the house very warm, even in the winter it was not necessary to wear a sweater inside.

In August 1951 Tom and Mary packed up everything and moved to St. Petersburg, Florida. Mary and Tom gave their dog Penny to her sister Clara's family and the black cat, Tipper [one of Flossy's kittens] was given to Tom's parents on their farm. In order to make the trip fun Tom and Mary decided that their daughters could eat whatever they wanted. What a great idea. Dolores would embarrass her sister by ordering hamburgers for breakfast along with grits.

Tom had checked with the Musician's Union in St. Petersburg, Florida and he knew he could get a job playing piano at night. He was also an experienced draftsman who had worked on designing tanks for General Motors during WWII. In Racine he worked at Massy-Harris designing tractors. When Tom moved to Florida he began doing architectural designing and drawings. He always worked a second job, playing piano in a club, this time in Tampa, Florida, where he met some Cuban musicians. Tom also was introduced to Cuban cigars. Tom was normally a pipe smoker but he loved the Cuban cigars.

The family lived in an efficiency apartment at first, only a few blocks from Mirror Lake Junior High where Pat and Dolores went to school. The family lived there for about two months. The Smith family soon moved into a larger apartment on 9th Street North. One day Tom got a call from his mother in Racine, Wisconsin. It seems that the cat, Tipper was so unhappy that the cat quit eating so Tom's mother called to say that he was on a train heading for St. Petersburg, Florida. Tipper was a very happy cat when he was picked up at the depot a couple days later and he could get out of his cage. He did well in Florida and lived to be 19 years old.

Tom found some property to buy on 45th Avenue North in St. Petersburg and began building a home for his family. The construction was very different from what he had built in Racine as there was no basement and the outside was built with cement blocks. Tom did most of the work himself. He had a lot of experience with cement blocks as he laid the block for the basements of the houses in Racine and this time he did not have to dig a hole other than to put in the footings for the block walls. To be closer to the new house, Tom and Mary found a small garage that had been converted into an apartment only two blocks from the new house. The family moved in before Christmas. Whatever the reason, that year, Mary left the Christmas tree up until Easter when practically all the needles had fallen off. Whenever she rearranged the furniture she would move the tree. They moved into the new house in 1952.

With both of her daughters settled in school, Mary decided to get a job. She went to work at a women's clothing store in downtown St. Petersburg. She had not worked in years but did very well selling, as she knew so much about the materials and construction of women's clothes. Unfortunately there was one, or two, problems, her daughters. She got a nice discount and by the time she paid for the clothes her two daughters wanted, there was very little of her paycheck left, not enough to pay for the trip downtown. Mary gave up her job after working for less than six months.

In August 1953 Thomas and Mary Smith's oldest daughter Patricia and her boyfriend Neil Hunkeler had eloped and secretly gotten married in Dothan, Alabama. The young couple moved into an apartment of their own. Mary Nelson Smith was now in her mid 40's and she learned to play the drums.



Dolores Munch & Emil
Munch 25th Wedding
Anniversary

Her teacher was the drummer in the band that Tom played piano with in a nightclub in Tampa, Florida. Mary's first drum was a thick piece of rubber on a board about a foot square called a practice pad. She used this pad to practice holding the sticks and keeping the beat to the various rhythms like a samba, or a tango. Mary said that Tom talked her into learning the drums to help her through the change of life. Beating on a drum was as good way as any to get rid of any tension. Mary was always a very nervous person and did not like being on stage but she was an excellent drummer, always kept a steady beat, and she liked being with Tom. Mary did very well and had her first job on New Year's Eve in St. Petersburg. In 1954 Thomas and Mary then formed a trio with a saxophone player and named the group The Tommy Smith Trio. At one period they also had a trumpet player in the group. They played at the Crystal Ball in Tampa, the Belle Vista Beach Hotel, the Blue Goose and the Topper all in St. Petersburg.

Mary and Tom moved to the east coast of Florida to look for work as soon as Patricia graduated high school in 1955. The pay scale for musicians was higher on the east coast of Florida. They stayed with Mary's sister Lillian Pedersen at a tourist attraction in Boca Raton, Florida that the Pedersen's owned, called Africa USA. They lived in a house that was built for an animal handler. At the time no one was using the house and Mary and Tom rented it for a couple weeks. Tom found a job working for an Architect in Fort Lauderdale named Paul Bradley, called it his day job. Then he went looking for a job for himself and Mary in the clubs around the area. When Mary and Tom moved to Fort Lauderdale, they performed as a duo with Tom playing both the piano and the trumpet and Mary on the drums.



Pat & Richard DiNino
Wedding 1985

In 1956 Tom and Mary's daughter, Dolores got married and she and her husband Emil Munch moved to Pensacola, Florida, where he was stationed in the Air Force. In June 1957 their first grandchild was born. Pat and Neil had a baby girl, Joni. In February 1959 their first grandson was born. Dolores and Emil had a little boy, Mark. In August 1959 Tom and Mary celebrated their 25th Anniversary with family and friends. Mary and Tom were still working as The Tunesmiths playing dance music at the Elks Club in Pompano Beach.

In 1960 Tom's parents Clayton and Katherine Smith sold their farm in Racine, Wisconsin and moved to Pompano Beach, Florida to be near their son. They bought a house in the same development as Tom and Mary. Dolores, her husband, Emil and their son, Mark moved in with them for the summer. Emil had finished the two years at the St. Petersburg Junior College and would be starting at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida in August to get an engineering degree. In August their daughter's family moved into married housing on campus at the University of Florida. Life pretty much settled down for Mary and Tom. They made frequent trips to visit their daughters and their families and also to visit their friends and family in Racine, Wisconsin. In 1962 Dolores produced another grandson, Kenneth. Then in 1963 Emil Munch graduated from the University of Florida and moved the family to Connecticut. When Mary and Tom visited them in 1964 they were treated to a trip to the World's Fair in New York City and a tour of Mark Twain's house in Hartford, Connecticut. Then there was the highlight of the trip for Tom. As a musician and a jazz enthusiast, he was thrilled to be going to the 1964 Newport Jazz Festival. The Count Basie Orchestra, Joe Williams, Chet



Pat & Richard DiNino

Baker, Stan Getz Quartet with Astrud Gilberto, the Thelonious Monk Quartet, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Mose Allison all performed the Friday night they attended. It was a great show.

In 1965 their daughter Dolores and her husband and family moved again, this time to Cincinnati, Ohio. When Dolores had her third son, Joel, Mary and Tom drove up to Cincinnati with their granddaughter, Joni, to help with the new baby.

Their daughter Dolores and her husband Emil and their three sons made lots of trips to Florida over the years so the boys could visit their grandparents. In 1972 they drove to Florida and met at a small lake close to Orlando, Florida, where Tom and Mary were living in a small trailer. Their daughter, Pat and her husband also came up to the lake. This would be the first visit to Disney World for Dolores and her family.

In 1980 Tom and Mary drove west with their small trailer and stayed in New Orleans for a few days. Later they traveled to Phoenix to see their niece, Beverly and her family. Tom and Mary went to see the Hoover Dam and they visited Las Vegas. Of course Tom and Mary took their cat and dog with them.

July 11, 1981, Dolores's oldest son Mark married Susan Smith and Mary and Tom drove up for the wedding with their dog and cat. Following the wedding Mary and Tom drove to Racine to visit relatives and friends.

1984 Pat and Dolores paid for a trip to New Orleans for Tom and Mary as a Christmas present. Tom and Mary hitched up their little travel trailer and made the trip the next spring in 1985. Unfortunately Tom became very ill and they had to come home early. Tom never fully recovered and he died July 27, 1986 of cancer of the colon. He was cremated as his will directed.

Mary went to live with her daughter Dolores and her family in Columbia, Maryland. Emil had built a kitchen and bathroom in their walk-out basement of their townhouse so Mary had her own apartment for her dog and two cats. She also had a car that she used to drive to the Senior Center in Columbia and the grocery store. Whenever she got lost she would call her daughter at her office in Columbia and Dolores would come show Mary the way to go home. Dolores worked for a great boss who believed that family came first so there was never a problem with Dolores taking time off to help Mary including taking Mary to her doctor at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore.

In 1989, when Emil's job had Mary's daughter Dolores and her husband moving to Cincinnati, Ohio, Mary decided to move back to Florida and she found an apartment in Sanford, a town near her daughter Patricia. Mary lived there for several years. In late 1995 Mary was moved into an assisted care apartment for a year before she needed full-time care. In September 1996 Mary went to live with her grandson, Ken and his wife, Lynda, her children, Brad, Brandon, Andrea and their new baby, Jonathan, in Colorado Springs, Colorado where Lynda would care for her. Mary's daughter Dolores and her husband lived in a small apartment in Denver and both of them worked. Mary was able to be at the wedding of her youngest grandson in October 1996 after coming to live in Colorado. In November Mary got pneumonia and was hospitalized. She was released before Christmas but the doctor told the family she would not get any better. Mary Nelson Smith died in her sleep on February 17, 1997 at the age of 86 years, 10 months. Mary was cremated as was Thomas and in 2002 her daughter Dolores released their ashes in St. Petersburg, Florida where the family had last been together.



1996 photo of Mary Nelson Smith with great grandson Jonathan Munch

The Albrektsen Family

Anine Christensen, sister of Christine Christiansen
married

Lars Peter Albrektsen

Children who emigrated to America: Margaret Albrektsen and Hans Albrektsen



Donald & Doris Sparks



Donald & Doris in Denmark



Agnes Bronson in Denmark



Gravestone for Lars Peter Albrektsen and Anine [Christensen] Albrektsen



Agnes Bronson in Denmark

Anine Christensen married Lars Peder Albrektsen December 3, 1895 in Randers County, Hvorum Parish. They had nine children, all born in Lindum, Viborg County. Anine and Lars first born were twins, Margrethe Kristine Albrektsen and Karen Nielsine Albrektsen, born April 1, 1896. Karen died at the age of 8 months. Margrethe Kristine and her brother, Hans Neilson Albrektsen, born 22 October 1897 emigrated to Racine and stayed with the Nelson family. Margrethe married John Thorup who became a well-known builder in the Racine area. Hans was a mason and he married Margit Alborga Alstrup and they later moved to Florida. Margrethe is pictured with the Nelsons in many of the family photographs. These pictures were provided by Doris Albrektsen Sparks, daughter of Hans and Margit Albrektsen. Doris and her husband Don Sparks live in California.

Dolores remembers visiting Margrethe Thorup many times in Racine with her mother, Mary, but did not know that Margrethe was her mother's cousin until she worked on the Nelson family history. Margrethe and John have a daughter, Agnes Thorup Bronson who lives in California.

Our common ancestor would be Karen Marie Hermansen and Hans Christensen.

My Trip to Denmark



Berritzgaard Manor House, Lolland



Copenhagen Waterfront



Rosenborg Castle, Copenhagen



Danish Countryside

For many years I wanted to travel to Denmark and see the land where my great-grandparents were born. I had been to Europe many times before as my mother, Christa Pedersen, is from Germany, so I have spent much time in Germany living with relatives over the years. Denmark always seemed so far north of where my family lives in southern Germany. Then back in 1999, a colleague who had just started working at the college where I work asked me if I was Danish, of course based on the spelling of my last name. I said “yes” and she said she also was half-Danish (maiden name Olson), but she did not know from where her ancestors were from in Denmark. Then in 2003, she found out from a relative that her family was originally from the Viborg area – all the small villages to the east of town. Of course I knew that is where all the Christensens and Nelsons were from! She had never been to Denmark, so we began to plan a trip there to explore the villages from where our ancestors came.

As they say, sometimes life is stranger than fiction. In an ironic twist, I mentioned earlier that James Nelson had emigrated to Manilla, Iowa. Well the friend I travelled with is originally from Manilla, Iowa, which was another focal point of Danish immigration much as Racine was.

We flew to Hamburg and then drove to Copenhagen. On the way there, we stopped at a manor house where the Pedersens had worked and lived, on the island of Lolland (for details, see the website at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berritzgaard>). We toured Copenhagen for a few days, taking in all the classic sites like the Little Mermaid statue in the Copenhagen harbor and the Rosenborg Castle. We then drove from Sealand to Jutland over a very large and long bridge. The countryside in Jutland looks very much like you would see in Wisconsin, low rolling hills, but mostly flat farmlands.



Hotel Spar 10 in Viborg



Downtown Viborg



Famous Viborg Cathedral



Viborg Museum

We arrived in Viborg after about a four-hour drive from Copenhagen so it was not that far. Viborg does not have many hotels as it is really not a typical tourist area like Copenhagen. The hotel we stayed at was rather unique – it was a combination conference center, driving school and hotel. Getting a driver's license is quite complicated and expensive in Europe, and requires advanced training, so people will stay at the hotel as they take their driving lessons. When I booked the reservations, I instinctively spelled my last name, which is just a habit I have, especially on the phone as in P-E-D as in David, E-R-S-E as in Edwin -N. The clerk seemed somewhat puzzled and responded "But that is the normal way to spell it." I was so glad to hear that, after spelling my name hundreds of times.

When we checked in, I said to the clerk that we had reservations for two rooms, so she took some keys, handed them to us, and went back to her work on the computer. Now I was puzzled...didn't she want to see our credit cards, passports, two forms of picture ID? "No", she said, "you will pay when you leave." People trust each other in Denmark; it was refreshing and good to know that trust still exists somewhere in this world.

As I was exploring the hotel, I noticed an open kitchen area and refrigerator in the hallway. I opened it and the refrigerator was filled with beer, soft drinks and juice, with a price list and a little can for money in the door. It was completely on the honor-system. I can't imagine that in any hotel in America.

We explored Viborg on that Saturday afternoon. All the Danes were finishing their shopping as stores close at 2 PM on Saturdays. It was fascinating to think that you could somehow be distantly related to people you are passing on the street, and that my great-great grandparents could have walked these same streets so many decades ago. We visited the museum in Viborg, where they had rooms set up as people would have lived in the 1800's. One thing I



Danish Pasture with Holstein Cows



Heath Park in Jutland



Marker stone for the heath lands



Søndervinge Church

noticed is that the Danes are not the typical blond-haired blue-eyed people that you might expect of Scandinavia. The pictures in the museum and people walking the streets mostly all had very dark brown hair, and I see that too in the pictures of our family. Of course, the exception to that are the “tow-head”¹⁴ babies and toddlers with that almost white hair we see in the baby pictures of our family.

The next day, Sunday, we set out for the villages. First we stopped at the heath park (*Kongenshus Hede*). This is a national park that preserves how Jutland looked in the time before the land was cultivated. It was covered with grasses and small shrubs that bloom a beautiful purple every August. Wild sheep roam the park and keep the plants under control. They also have several markers and carved stones for each district of Viborg county that tells how much of the land was once covered with heath in 1850 and then in 1950. In the example on the left, Middelsom-Sønderlyng region was about 30% covered in heath in 1850, but by 1950 it was down to less than 10%. It took many centuries of work to bring the land in Jutland to be as productive as it is today.

Because it was Sunday, we were afraid that we would disturb people during church services as we had hoped to find some ancestors exploring church cemeteries. The first church we visited was in Søndervinge, and it is one of the more notable churches in Jutland. It was about 10 in the morning, but there was no sign of anyone, and the church was locked tight. In the next village, the same thing – the church was locked, no one around. It turns out because of low attendance, most churches in Denmark are only open for services one day a month, and have other ceremonies like

¹⁴ Tow means “flax or hemp fiber”, and so tow-headed is literally “flaxen haired”. This meaning of tow comes from Middle Low German *touw* (which means “flax, hemp fiber”). This probably went back to the prehistoric Germanic base **tow-*, **taw* “make, prepare” (source also of English *tool*), in the sense “make yarn from wool; spin”. (Other variations are *towhead* and, though incorrect, *toehead*.)



Lindum Church



Danish Farm



The village of Hvorum

christenings or weddings as needed. Not one church was open to go in and look. All of the Danish Lutheran churches are quite old and date back to the 1100's-1400's and were built as Catholic churches as part of the Holy Roman Empire. When the Reformation came, the churches were converted to Lutheran as they remain today.

Looking through the cemeteries we did not find any ancestors, which did not surprise me. I knew that most people are only buried for 25 years. It's a matter of space. After so many centuries, leaving all the graves would mean that Denmark would just be one big cemetery. The other difficulty is that there only seems to be about six last names in Jutland – Christensen, Nielsen, Hansen, Jensen, Rasmussen and Pedersen. That covers about 80% of the graves we saw. The cemeteries are meticulously maintained – they even had grooves carefully raked in the gravel so that you felt guilty just walking on it.

Being there, it was easy to imagine what life was like in the 1700 and 1800's. Everything must have revolved around the farm, especially given the short summers of northern Denmark. Not much has changed in these little villages over time; most of them serve today as suburbs of the larger nearby towns as farming has become highly commercialized as it is here in America.

To have all the villages and towns come to life was truly a memorable experience, and I am already planning my return trip to Denmark. They say you have to know where you have been to know where you are going, and I know where I have been, and I am forever touched by Jutland and Denmark.

-Ginger L. Pedersen

To see more pictures of my trip, see the website at:

www.aresrocket.com/europe2007

Danish Recipes

Green Kale Soup (Grønkaalssuppe)



Although not Grandma Nelson's exact recipe, this one sounds pretty close to the one described by Shirley Schneider. Look for kale in the bagged salad section of your supermarket's produce department.

2-3 smoked ham hocks
1 beef bone
2 leeks or onions
1 tablespoon salt
celery leaves, whole
fresh parsley leaves, whole
1/2 cup barley
3 medium potatoes, diced
3 large carrots, diced
3 cups kale, hard spine removed, washed, and chopped fine

Cover ham hocks and beef bone with water; bring to a boil and cook on low for 60 - 90 minutes. Skim as necessary.
Add leeks or onions, salt, and celery and parsley tied together in a bundle. When meat is tender, remove meat from bones and return meat to soup. Strain broth; return to kettle and add barley, diced potatoes, and carrots. Cook until vegetables are almost tender.
Add kale about 20 minutes before other vegetables are fully cooked. Serve hot with warm, crusty bread.



Frikadellar

This is a real Danish classic. I bought some cooked Frikadellar in Viborg at a butcher's shop – they were great! Danish fast food at its best. We had this many times at my grandparent's house.

1 lb ground beef
1/2 lb ground pork
1 small onion, chopped fine
1 teaspoon salt
2 eggs
3/4 cup milk
1/4 cup flour
1/4 teaspoon pepper

Mix the beef, pork, eggs and milk well. Add flour, onion, salt & pepper. Mix well. In heavy skillet melt some shortening to coat pan. Form the mixture into egg/oval shapes; brown until done. Serve with mashed potatoes and a good Carlsberg Danish beer.



Aunt Agnes's Chop Suey

I can remember having this many times at Aunt Aggie's house on Vassalo Drive in Lake Worth. My dad really loved this dish and it is good – very simple ingredients. Gloria Overdier, Agnes's daughter was kind enough to share her mother's recipes.

1 pound veal and pork, cut into small cubes

1 large onion, chopped

6 stalks of celery, chopped

Soy sauce

1 tablespoon cornstarch, mixed with 2 tablespoons water

2 ½ cups water

Steamed rice

Brown meat in skillet. Add onions and celery. Cover with water and simmer until meat is tender. Add enough soy sauce for rich brown color. Thicken with corn starch/water mixture and cook until sauce is clear. Serve with steamed rice



Aunt Mary's Blitz Torte

Dolores shared this recipe of her mother's - Aunt Mary usually put grape jelly between the layers but once in a while she would make vanilla pudding and put that between the cake layers. It is a really good tasting cake and very light.

1/2 cup sugar

1 cup flour

1/2 cup butter

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon vanilla

1/8 teaspoon salt

4 egg yolks

5 tablespoons milk

Topping: 3/4 cup sugar, 4 egg whites

Cream butter and sugar, add vanilla and egg yolks and beat well.

Sift dry ingredients and all alternating with milk. Pour into two round greased cake pans.

Beat egg whites until very stiff. Fold in sugar and spread on top of cake batter in pans.

Bake at 350 degrees for 30-40 minutes.

Add jelly or pudding between the two layers. No frosting is needed.



Aunt Agnes's Danish Apple Cake

This is a classic Danish recipe, again made with very simple ingredients. You can substitute bottled apple sauce for the home made variety. Its more of a "spoon cake" than a cake that cuts very easy into pieces.

4 apples

2 cups toasted bread crumbs, zwieback or Holland rusk, rolled fine

1 tablespoon sugar

1/2 tsp. cinnamon

1/4 cup butter

1/2 pint whipping cream

1 tablespoon powdered sugar

Peel apples and core. Add ½ cup water and cook until apples are soft and mash into applesauce. Cool.

Brown crumbs in a skillet with 1 T. sugar, cinnamon, and butter. Place prepared crumbs in well-buttered 9x9x2-inch baking dish in layers alternating with cooked applesauce. Refrigerate. Unmold. Serve cold with a generous helping of whipped cream, sweetened with powdered sugar.



Aunt Agnes's Stuffed Spareribs

I can remember my grandparents making a very similar dish, sometimes using apples instead of prunes. Spareribs used to be a very economical cut of meat as no one really wanted them.

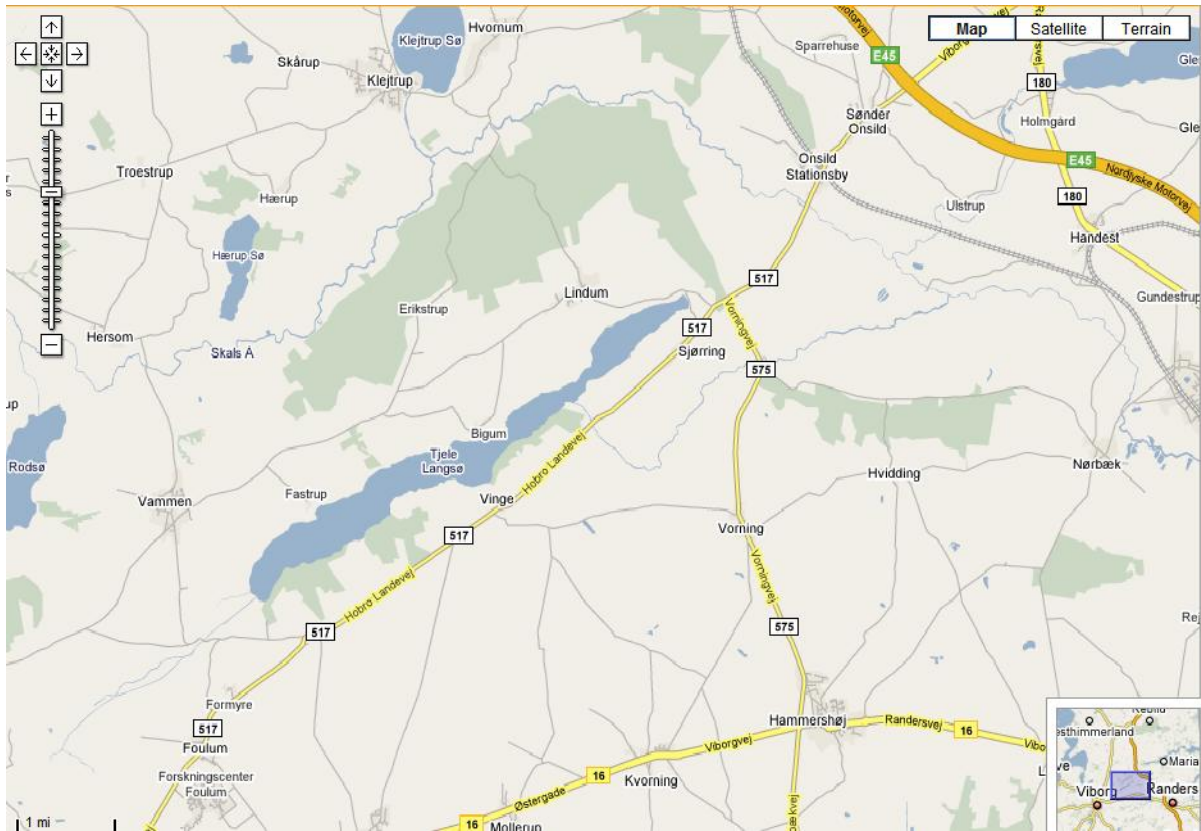
1 rack spare ribs

Prunes

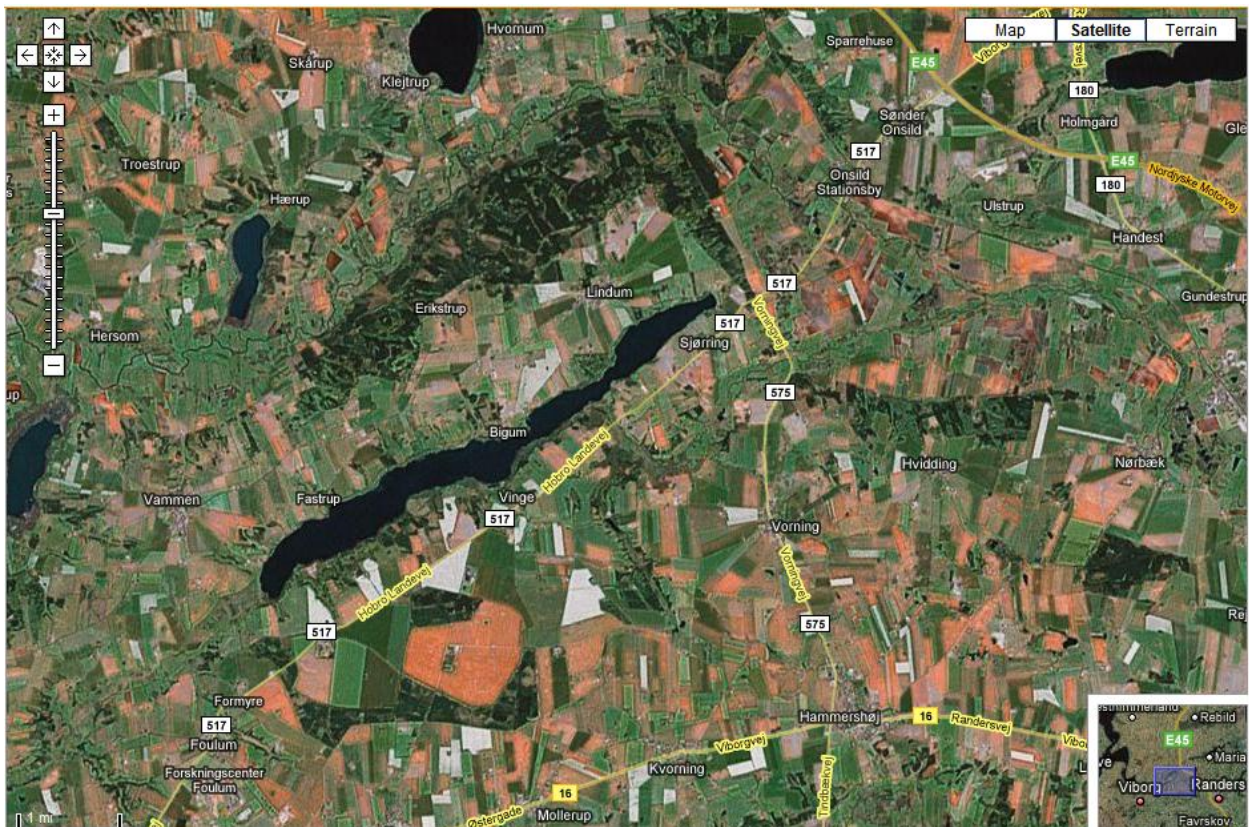
Salt/pepper

Cut ribs in 3 rib portions. Stuff with prunes, roll and tie with string. Season with salt and pepper. Brown on all sides in heavy skillet or Dutch oven. Add water, cover and simmer for 1 hour.

Maps



Map and aerial view of the villages to the east of Viborg from Google Maps. Hvornum is at the top of the map, and Vinge is near the middle, Sjørring is northeast of Vinge, Lindum is west of Sjørring. As you can see in the aerial photo below, this is all farmland.



Village Churches

These pictures were taken from the “Kirke I Danmark” website at <http://www.dis-danmark.dk/kirkeimg/index.asp>. All of the old churches in Denmark date from the middle ages and were built as Catholic churches. They are gothic in style, and many have beautiful frescoes – for photos of the frescoes, see the website at <http://www.panoramas.dk/church-murals/index.html>. These are the churches in which our ancestors were baptized, married and mourned.



Lindum Kirke



Interior of the Lindum Kirke



Hvorum Kirke



Nørre Vinge Kirke



Fiskbæk Kirke



Lundø Kirke

Internet References for Denmark & Danish Research

Danish Census Records: ddd.dda.dk/ddd_en.htm - These instructions are in English and allow you to search through an actual database so you can type in names and do searches, but you have to at least supply a county name.

Danish Church Books: www.arkivalieronline.dk/ - The books are of course in Danish, but so are the instructions! Here is a guidebook in English on using the archives - www.kinquest.com/dkgenealogy/AOguide.php These access the original scanned church books, so you have to know the county, district and parish and approximate dates for a successful search.

Dictionaries: www.damkvist.dk/ordbog/ - click on the letter you want to list. www.kalliope.org/dict.cgi - mostly in Danish.

Emigration Archives: allows you to search through a database of Emigration records - www.emiarch.dk/home.php3?l=en

Forums: The site www.dis-danmark.dk/dis-english.asp has forums where you can pose questions or ask for help in translations.

Hvornum: a small website about Hvornum (in Danish) - <http://www.hvornum-by.dk/>

Mormon Church: The Mormon Church (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) maintains extensive online records you can search for free at www.familysearch.org

My Danish Roots – Good overall resource for finding relatives and information about Denmark - <http://mydanishroots.com>

Randers: Information in English about Randers, Denmark - www.visitranders.com.

Translation: This site www.gramtrans.com allows you to cut and paste in text in Danish and it does a pretty good job of translating text into English.

Viborg: Information in English about Viborg, Denmark www.viborg.dk

Family Films at You Tube

I have uploaded several films clips to YouTube that are also on the CD that should accompany this book.

Family Film from Racine, early 1940's -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVHdvAgISWo>

Family Outing at Brown's Lake -

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8_sz6VSsHQ&feature=related

Africa U.S.A. –

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_Txj6FhIFY

Lillian and John Pedersen –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha3QyOXVyY0>

Lillian Pedersen and Shirley Schneider –

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF_L2_R616Y

Sample Church Book Page – Birth of Karen Christensdatter in
Lindum, 1816 (Number 5 below)

Født. Drindet.							
No.	År og Datum.	Barnets fulde Navn.	Daabs- stam, enten i Kirken eller Hjemme.	Forældrenes Navn, Stand, Haandtering og Bopæl.	Faddernes Navn Stand og Opholdssted.	Hvor an- ført i det almindelige Fødsels- Register.	Bemærkninger.
4.	1816 1. Maj	Anne Christens- datter	Jens Christen i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	Jens Christen og hustru Kathrine i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	Anders Christen og hustru Kathrine i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	1816 No. 9	Indføiret 1. 12. 1815
5.	1816 1. Maj	Karen Christens- datter	Jens Christen i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	Jens Christen og hustru Kathrine i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	Anders Christen og hustru Kathrine i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	1816 No. 10	Indføiret 1. 12. 1815
6.	1816 1. Maj	Seene Sophie Christens datter	Jens Christen i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	Jens Christen og hustru Kathrine i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	Anders Christen og hustru Kathrine i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	1816 No. 11	Indføiret 1. 12. 1815
7.	1816 1. Maj	Kristen Christens datter	Jens Christen i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	Jens Christen og hustru Kathrine i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	Anders Christen og hustru Kathrine i Kirken 1. 12. 1815	1816 No. 12	Indføiret 1. 12. 1815

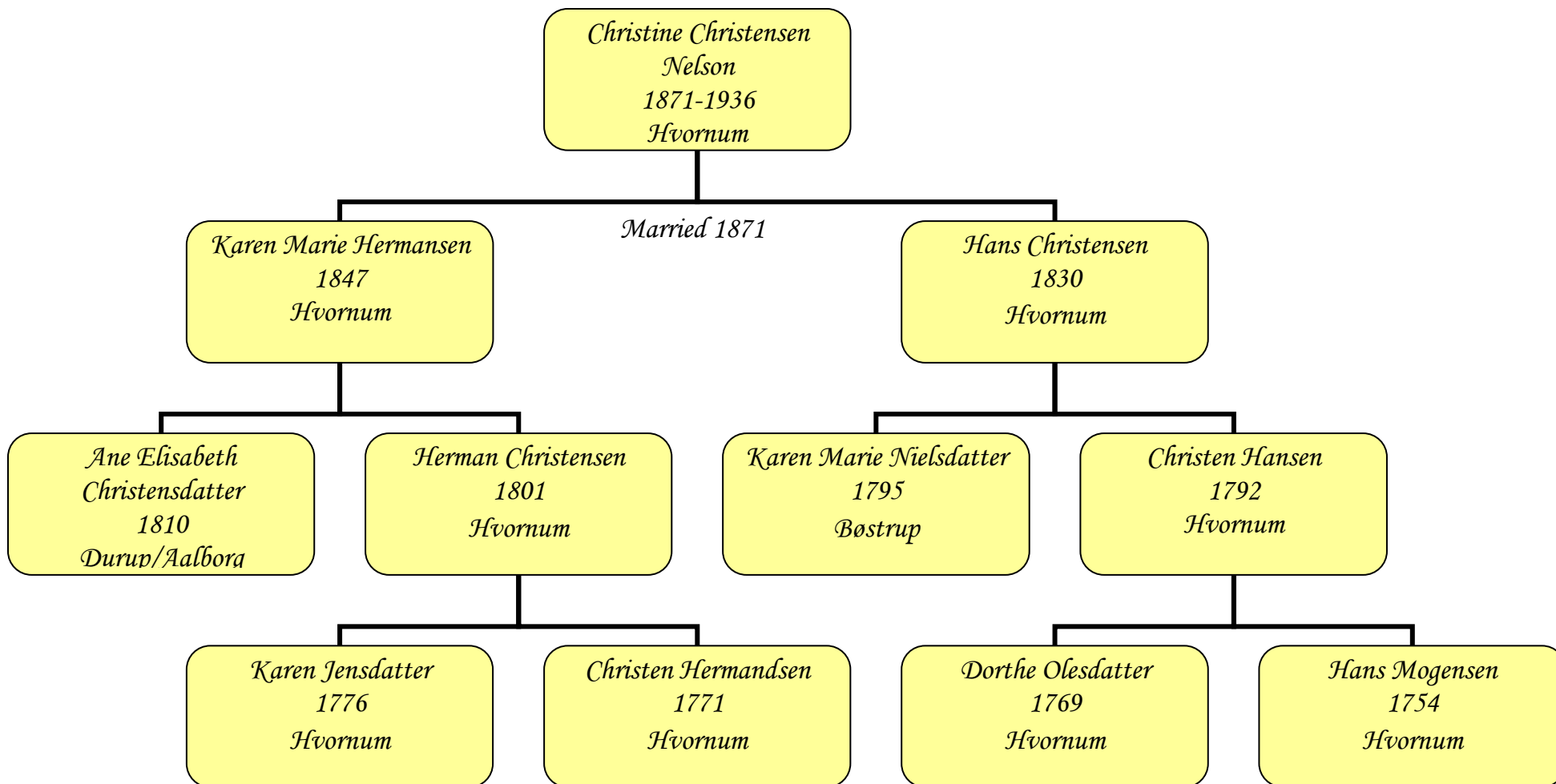
Sample Census Record – Jens Laursen's Family, 1855

Hjætte eller Efternavn Rang med Na- tural af Staat, Født o.s.v.	Samtlige Personers fulde Navn.	Alder, om ikke angivet, angives ikke	Hjætte, gift, Ekte, mand, Ekte eller Dødsfald.	Bekendtgjort, om ikke angivet, angives ikke	Personernes Bølling i Familien, Titel, Ejendoms, Herred, Næringsvej eller af hvilken Egetid de leve, eller om de forføres af Bøllingsfæstet.	Af disse være:		Anmærkninger.
						Drømme.	Slægt.	
Ung								
1	Marianne Laursen	40	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Nils Christensen	46	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Christiane Jensen	43	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Maria Christensen	11	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Anna Christensen	8	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Jens Christensen	4	gift	Ung	Ung			
1	Jens Jensen	38	gift	Ung	Ung			
1	Jens Laursen	38	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Maria Christensen	34	gift	Ung	Ung			
	H. Christensen	11	gift	Ung	Ung			
	E. Christensen	9	gift	Ung	Ung			
1	Christine Christensen	43	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Friedrich Christensen	48	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Maria Christensen	44	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Jacob Christensen	8	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Christiane Christensen	6	gift	Ung	Ung			
1	Maria Hansen	60	gift	Ung	Ung			
	Jens Hansen	68	gift	Ung	Ung			

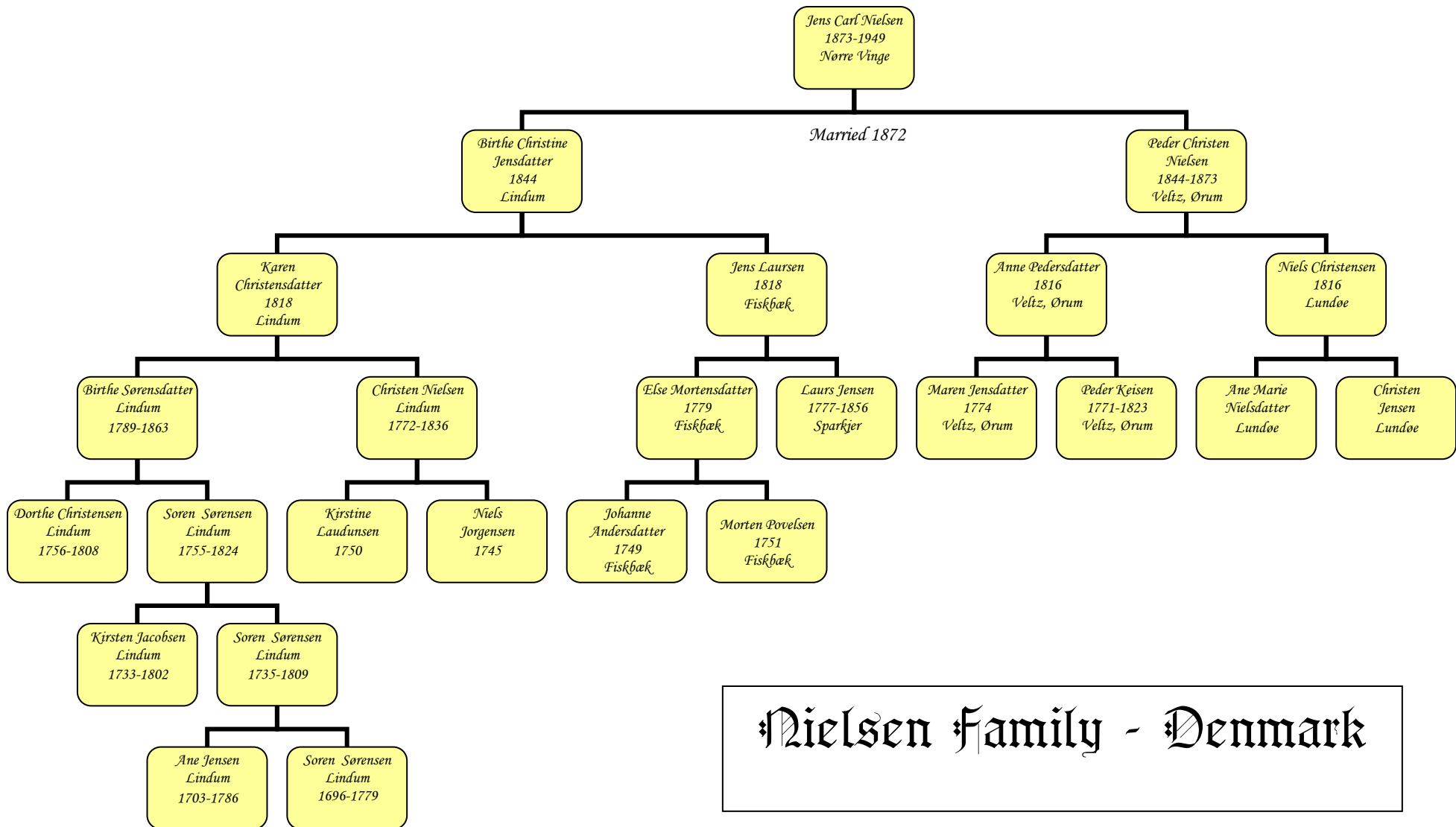
Basic Danish Words

EnglishDanish

births	..... født, født
burials	..... begravede, begravelse, jordet
census	..... folketælling
child	..... barn
christenings	..... døpte, døbt, daab
confirmations	..... konfirmerede
deaths	..... døde, død
father	..... fader, far
female	..... kvinde (køn), pige
husband	..... mand, husbonde, husfader
index	..... register
male	..... mand (køn), drenge
marriages	..... copulerede, vielse, ægtevielse, bryllup
military	..... militær
mother	..... moder, mor
moving in	..... tilgangsliste, inflytning
moving out	..... afgangliste, udflytning
name, given	..... navne
name, surname	..... efternavne
parents	..... forældre
parish	..... sogn
vaccinations	..... vaccinerede
wife	..... hustru, husmoder, kone, kvinde
year	..... år, anno



Christensen Family - Denmark



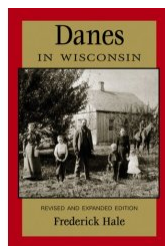
Discover your Danishness!



Some movies, books and Internet links to get in touch with your Danish roots:



Movie – Babette's Feast – This movie won the 1987 Academy Award for best foreign film; you can hear Danish spoken and see what life was like in Jutland the 1800's. Babette's Feast is a wonderful story of two spinster sisters who hire a French maid in a tiny village.



Book – Danes in Wisconsin – Frederick Hale – A history of Danish immigrants who came to Wisconsin. From the Wisconsin Historical Society.



O&H Danish Bakery in Racine – Order a kringle and enjoy! Internet Address - <http://www.ohdanishbakery.com/> Phone - 1.800.709.400

Danish Recipes – Hundreds of recipes on this Internet site - <http://www.mindspring.com/~cborgnaes/>

Learn some Danish online – Direct from the old country - <http://www.speakdanish.dk/>

Listen to some Danish radio stations – large selection of different Danish radio stations broadcasting over the Internet - <http://www.listenlive.eu/denmark.html>

End Note

I hope that you have enjoyed learning about our family and our heritage in Denmark. I think the thing that has had the greatest impact on me is how people of little means and education in Denmark looked to America for opportunity and hope. As I look back at their lives in Denmark, they did not have much choice in profession or lifestyle – it was nothing but hard work, usually as a day-laborer, finding what ever needed to be done on the local farms. But Jens and Christine wanted something more.

America's number one asset has been and always will be opportunity. Each of the Nelson children took advantage of those opportunities in different ways; Jens could have never had a bicycle and motorcycle shop in Denmark; Lillian would have not been able to have an entrepreneurial life with her husband; Alma could not have had her own career after her husband's death; Mary could have not learned to play the drums and started a musical career with her husband. These are all uniquely American stories.

As the generations advance, I hope this work will be preserved for future generations so that they can reflect on the sacrifices and chances that Jens and Christine took over 100 years ago. We must do what they did, make life better for all that come after us.

About the Authors:



Ginger L. Pedersen lives in Boynton Beach, Florida. Professionally, she works at Palm Beach Community College as Dean of Curriculum, Planning & Research. Ginger also maintains a history website on Africa-U.S.A., an animal park founded by the Pedersen family in the 1950's (www.africa-usa.com). She enjoys travel, caring for her herd of six cats, and anything to do with history. She can be reached via email at pedersen.gl@gmail.com.



Dolores Jeanne Smith Munch lives in Vail, Arizona with her husband of over 50 years, Emil. After retiring in 2001, she has enjoyed researching the family histories of both the Smith and Nelson families. She also enjoys doting on her grandchildren and traveling around the county. She can be reached via email at djmunch38@msn.com.

Map of Denmark



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